

Ragnarok KURUMI

SpiritNo.21-Extra

AstralDress-NunType Weapon-PageType[Beelzebub-Yeled]

橘公司

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アイブ・ア・デット

狂三ラグナロク

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ファンタジア文庫

デート・ア・ライブ 17 狂ニラグナロク

DATE A LIVE Ragnarok KURUMI





「……………」

「だ、だから誤解だって！
ただ二人でいたから連れてきただけだよ！」

「……大丈夫。真那^{まな}は兄様の味方です。
これからしっかり罪を償^{つぐな}っていきましょう」

「悪いが、おまえたちの相手は私たちではない」

精霊——夜刀神十香

「俺とおまえの、戦争の時間だ」

高校生——五河士道

「首肯。夕弦たちは
その護衛に過ぎません」

精霊——八舞夕弦

「呵々、そういうことよ。
汝らには相応しい相手がいる」

精霊——八舞耶俱矢



「今まで——何度も俺を助けてくれて、
本当に、ありがとう」

「……あら、あら。大胆ですね、士道さん」

精霊——時崎狂三
ときざきくるみ





「あたしは」にして全、全にして」

疑似精霊——ニベルコル

CONTENTS

断章 精霊の誕生	004
第一章 開戦の狼煙	018
第二章 夢魔の暗躍	072
第三章 最後の休息	123
第四章 終焉の足音	200
第五章 精霊の復活	287

あとがき	333
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精霊

THE SPIRIT

隣界に存在する特殊災害指定生命体。発生原因、存在理由ともに不明。
こちらの世界に現れる際、空間震を発生させ、周囲に甚大な被害を及ぼす。
また、その戦闘能力は強大。

対処法 1

WAYS OF COPING 1

武力を以てこれを殲滅する。
ただし前述の通り、非常に高い戦闘能力を持つため、達成は困難。

対処法 2

WAYS OF COPING 2

——デートして、デレさせる。

狂三ラグナログ

Ragnarok KURUMI

SpiritNo.3

AstralDress-NightmareType Weapon-ClockType[Zafkiel]

Fragment Chapter: The Birth of the Spirit

“.....Ha! Ha!”

In a small settlement in the mountains, inside a flower garden, there was a young girl struggling to keep her hands extended forward.

She was a young girl about seven years of age with pale blonde hair and deep sea-blue eyes. Though her hair still had a lack of pigmentation, her cheeks on the other hand had been struck with a bright red hue as beads of perspiration fell down from her forehead. It wasn't clear if this was caused by exerting all of her strength into her whole body just now.

It looked just like a swollen punk face that would break out in inflammation at any moment.

“That—is—to say. Even if you exert all this effort it won't work. Calm your mind down more; it's similar to feeling of a gentle touch.”

Looking at the state of the girl, the boy beside her gave out a vigorous sigh while shrugging his shoulders.

“Look here.”

As the young boy said so, he suddenly narrowed his eyes and stretched out a finger.

Then, right at the next moment, a sparkling radiance gradually built up and rose from the surrounding flowers, slowly moving towards the direction pointed by the boy's finger.

“Wow.....”

After staring at such a spectacular scene, the young girl wrinkled her brows as her entire body began to shake.

“Fumumumumumu.....!”

“No, that's why.”

Looking on at the girl who showed no signs of improvement, the boy half opened his eyes.

At that time, a voice coming from behind them was calling out the names of the two of them.

“—Ellen, Elliot, are you guys here?”

“Hmm?”

“Puha.....”

The boy—Elliot turned his head around. The girl—Ellen stopped trying to choke on her own breath.

Turning around at a first glance, the figure of a thin boy emerged from there. It was a young boy who was characterized by dull ash-blond hair. His age should be one year younger than Elliot, who was around ten years old.

However, if one didn’t know any better, it could be said that he exuded a cunning and mature atmosphere.

“Ike!”

Seeing his figure approach, Ellen’s expression gleamed up. The boy who was called Ike approached the two of them with a soft smile.

“Have the two of you been practicing in this place again?”

“It can’t be helped. Ellen here can’t succeed in anything. Even though Karen is so talented, why is there such a large gap between sisters?”

As Elliot exclaimed in a disappointed tone, tears began to come out of Ellen’s eyes as she started sobbing.

“.....To say such a thing, it’s not like I can’t do it because I want to.....”

“Ah really, don’t cry! Sorry, sorry, that was my bad!”

As Elliot apologized, Ellen wiped her eyes of tears with her hand as her nose sniffled. Then, Ike gently stroked Ellen's head.

"No worries, Ellen. I'll also help, so let's go to the practice ground. Hey Elliot, wouldn't making mana so visible cause the teacher to get angry at you again?"

Hearing what Ike had said, Elliot sighed as he folded his arms.

"Hehe. Everyone, even the adults are all cowards. Even though there's obviously no person that I know who would want to come to such a remote place like this."

"Well, don't say it like that. It can't be helped. In the teacher's generation, the persecution of magicians was particularly violent."

As Ike spoke out with a bitter smile, Elliot once again gave a heavy sigh.

—"Magicians" (Magus)

That's right. In this world, people called by that name existed.

They sometimes were held outside the boundary of thoughts from ordinary people, sometimes known as shamans, fortune tellers, pharmacists, and witches.

Even so, it wasn't the same as the magic from a fairy tale, where simply waving a magical stick would suffice to produce some desirable event.

Magic is a discipline to train one to capture the sight that ordinary people cannot see, touch the basic essence beyond the grasp of ordinary people. It is an academic discipline to enhance one's abilities: a cultural system.

And people like Elliot were blood relatives of the descendants that inherited the culture of such magicians.

"Even so, how come they have to so afraid? It's not to like the teachers will be beaten if they quarreled with ordinary people."

"Well, I guess so."

“Really? If it were seen like that—”

“But that’s only in a situation where it is one against a hundred. Wouldn’t it be a different story if it were one against a thousand?”

“That.....well.....”

“That’s the justification. From within itself, humanity is afraid of the things that they cannot comprehend, and from that fear breeds riots and madness. By that aspect, ignorance actually suppresses all the other virtues.”

“Ke, I don’t understand what you are saying.”

As Elliot turned his face around as he spoke, Ike exposed a mature smile as he stood up to leave.

—However, for Elliot, it wasn’t long before he learned the meaning behind those words.

“Ah.....ah.....”

A few months later.

Above a hill overlooking his hometown in blazes, Elliot stood there expressionlessly as his voice trembled below a whisper.

It was self-evident that the fire wasn’t caused by some leftover cigarette ashes that were ignored. No, it was clear that the fire was set by someone with clear murderous intent and a desire for harm.

The people who barely escaped from their burning houses were ruthlessly gunned down and collapsed beneath the men who were waiting outside.

Although it wasn’t clear who they were, their purpose no doubt was the complete eradication of magicians.

“Elliot...Elliot! The village, our village!”

“.....Don’t be so loud, Ellen.....”

“But.....!”

Elliot tightly clutch onto Ellen who was about to raise her voice again, causing his chest to be completely soaked with Ellen’s tears. Ellen’s sister, Karen, who had also evacuated alongside her, bite against her lips while staring at the hem of Elliot’s clothes.

Having happened so suddenly, the loss of their hometown was too heavy of a tragedy for boys and girls around the age of ten to accept.

However—among this, there was only one person.

There was a boy who looked down upon the burning village without too much dismay.

“.....”

Ike, even with the hot winds against his face, stared at the village that had fallen into ruin, gazing intensely as his fellow compatriots were being shot dead.

“Ike.....?”

Although he could not understand what Ike was thinking at the time as his face was illuminated by the fire, Elliot felt something resembling an uneasy sensation coming from him on that day.

Although magicians were viewed as heresy among mankind, even among them it had felt like he had become a completely different type of creature—

“Elliot, Ellen, Karen.”

At that moment, as if to interrupt Elliot’s thought process, Ike called out the names of his fellow survivors.

“—Let’s create a world, to expel humanity, a world where only magicians can exist. This began with them, so is there no reason why we shouldn’t do it?”

Then, he declared.

—In hindsight, this was the oldest memory of the foundations that would lead to the beginning of DEM.

After that, ten years had passed. Elliot and the others had been buried under the research of magic.

Of course, the world wasn't simple enough for children of about ten years of age to live alone. It was necessary to rely on foster care during the first few years.

However, it didn't take long for a brilliant young boy like Ike to win the fancy of a wealthy couple. It also didn't take long for the old couple to pass away due to an unfortunate accident.

Indeed, as soon as Ike obtained enough assets through covert means, he invited Elliot and the others to his home. For as much as time would allow, they obtained a taste of the mystery.

Theosophy. Occultism. Alchemy. And the Kabbalah. From the falsifications made public to *humans*, they carefully uncovered the genuine article.

Then—the time finally came.

—That day.

In the central part of the Eurasia continent, the wind was silent as if heralding the arrival of a storm.

Three figures stood amidst the open wilderness.

Ike, Elliot, Ellen.

The three magicians who had grown up to be beyond recognition from that time had come to gather here.

“—Shall we get started. Karen, get ready.”

“Yes.”

In response to Ike’s words, Karen’s voice could be heard from the observatory through the communication device.

At the same time, the device designed to draw out the circle—the magical furnace began to start up while growling out a low howl.

From the skies, from the earth, from the air.

The energy that resides in every substance in the world turned into dazzling light, swirling and coiling around the surroundings.

— *Spirit Formula*.

That was the name Elliot had given to this ritual.

Gathering all of the mana present in the world to a single focal point to create a new life.

By incorporating that power, Elliot and the others, who up until now could only tinker with a tiny amount mana through spells and books, could become all power wizards found in fantasy worlds.

“Ike, with this—”

“Ah. The Spirit will be born— in the wake of a new world enveloping this world.”

Hearing Ellen’s words, Ike raised the corners of his lips to speak.

“—Voluntary territory. A universal space that should only exist in humanity’s imagination is being changed into reality. If the calculations are correct, the space of the Spirit being born is to the extent of covering the entire earth. The scale is enough to be called another world—the neighboring world.”

Ike moved forward while clenching his hand into a fist.

“That is our world. We will overwrite our world with the neighboring world.”

“.....”

Elliot gulped as he listened to Ike’s words while looking on to the side of his face.

He did not intend to object to what Ike was saying that this moment. For this goal, Elliot had sacrificed ten years’ worth of time.

But why—

Ike’s face as he was describing their hope looked the same as the face that he had displayed on that day.

“—Time to prepare for the aftermath when the Spirit appears. Elliot, prepare the talisman.”

“.....Ah.”

Elliot’s shoulders slightly trembled as began using the talisman to collect enough mana to produce a barrier to cover three people.

The very next moment.

“——!”

Alongside a tremendous shock, his field of vision was dyed completely white.

Vibrations struck his entire body even though nothing could be heard through the barrier. It was just like the illusion of a missile being dropped onto their heads, creating an explosion of a ridiculous scale. As the ground was scrapped away, it felt to Elliot just like falling through his own barriers.

“Hah....., hah.....”

After the vibrations stopped, Elliot finally dissolved the barrier.

While waiting for the smoke and dust to disperse, he looked around the surroundings—the sight left him completely speechless.

There was nothing left.

The fields, mountains, even the silhouettes of the cities too far away to be seen.

Everything had disappeared altogether.

No—to say it more accurately, there was only one thing left there.

Something that Elliot had never seen before was floating in front of them.

“.....Fuhahahahahahahahaha.”

Ike’s laughter echoed on the empty earth.

—It was a girl.

With her entire body surrounded by a faint brilliant light, a beautiful girl had appeared there.

—Spirit.

That moment was the beginning of a long-lasting fate.



Chapter 1: The Signal Outbreak of War

“——,——”

Even if there was a desire to let out a sound, there was only hoarse panting coming from her lips.

With such extreme tension and only a small parcel of excitement at the moment, her body and mind collapse into exhaustion. Tokisaki Kurumi's legs slightly trembled before finally collapsing onto the ground.

“Me!”

“Are you alright?”

Subsequently, the young girls surrounding her all issued out a voice of anxious concern.

With hair tied unevenly between the left and right side and a clock shaped visage for a left eye, they were all clones of Kurumi with the exact same appearance as her.

Kurumi gave out a few hoarse coughs before slowly standing up.

“Un.....it's no big deal.”

Right now, Kurumi was located at the roof of a building very late at night. With the moon now covered by the clouds, only the streetlights on the ground provided a dim illumination to look around.

“.....”

Kurumi looked down to stare at the murky darkness of her own shadow. While slowly lifting her leg—gack! She trampled down with the heel of her leg.

This was not to call out her Angel or the other clones lurking in the shadow. Just—nothing more than to feel relief about the Spirit caught inside the center of her shadow a moment ago.

Yes, until beforehand, Kurumi was in the midst of a confrontation by the presence of a certain Spirit classified by the name <Phantom>.

With its existence hidden away in mystery by covering with a layer of noise, it was the Spirit who can turn humans into Spirits. And so, the figure after being stripped away of that mosaic—turned out to be none other than the assistant teacher for Shido and the others and the <Ratatoskr> analytic officer, Murasame Reine.

But even so, merely kicking the shadow wasn't enough to verify the current status inside.

Although there was only a single entrance, Kurumi's shadow was roughly divided into two areas.

One space is similar to a storage sanctuary where clones can freely squirm to come in and out as they like.

Connected to that, there was another space designed like a stomach to plunder the "time" of intruders.

Of course, Kurumi had sent the swallowed up Reine to the latter.

That space was also involuntary for Kurumi. Not only could she not spit out those swallowed in, it was also completely impossible to peek into to understand the situation inside as well. It was just like how humans are unable to use the naked eye to look inside their own body.

.....The reason for kicking against the shadow was simply because there was no other destination to transmit the emotions burning up.

Not matter how mighty the Spirit, it was impossible to be alive after being caught in that space. Having recovered briefly from the silent and tranquil atmosphere returning, Kurumi breathed out a light sigh.

"Really—that was too easy. For a Spirit to excessively break up her own power.....to that extent."

As if speaking to herself, Kurumi muttered out loud.

In fact, this was not her original power. As a result, of Kurumi's surprise attack she didn't even have the time to equip her Astral Dress.

However, the more important thing was the result. Reine had disappeared while Kurumi was still standing there. Only that fact was the outcome of that battle.

Kurumi sharpened her gaze after taking in another deep breath. Then, she slowly raised her head.

"Come—we. This is not the end. My target is not that rubbish person from a moment ago, but rather that monster in its heyday 30 years ago."

"....."

As Kurumi spoke out loudly, the clones all nodded with an obedient look on their faces.

"To that end, the reiryoku sealed within Shidou-san is indispensable—come."

"Eh, eh, let's go."

"Break apart DEM's plans, and capture Shidou-san in *my* own hands."

"If <Phantom> divided her power like this, it'll be easy to defeat her before she is born."

"Eh, But—"

Suddenly, one clone exposed an expression of doubt.

"Why would <Phantom> divide her own power to increase the number of Spirits. Certainty, wouldn't that be only asking for oneself to incur weakness?"

"....."

After hearing the clone's words, Kurumi remained silent for a while.

Indeed, it was just like what she had said. If Reine had been in a state of full power, then there was no chance that even Kurumi could win.

With this matter related to her own life, Kurumi didn't think that she was only playing around by turning humans into Spirits.

There was something—a reason.

Even if it meant the loss of power, something that needed to be finished.

Even if it meant exposing your own life in danger, something you want to achieve.

“.....”

However, no matter how much thought was put on this, it was impossible to think up an answer. The only woman who could answer that question was now sleeping in the darkness of the shadow.

“—Humm.”

With a disgruntled grunt, Kurumi departed from that location while accompanied by her clones.



“—Commander! Shidou-kun's response has been captured!”

Onboard an airborne ship floating in the skies of Tenguu City, <Fraxinus>, the crew member's voice resounded on the bridge.

In response to that voice, the girl sitting on the captain's seat with twintails tied behind her shoulder stood up.

“! Well done, where is he!?”

As the captain of <Fraxinus> and commanding officer of <Ratatoskr>, Itsuka Kotori raised the Chupa Chups stick in her mouth upward as she leaned her body forward to focus on the monitor screen.

Despite this, there was no one there who would say that her response was over excessive.

After all, the whereabouts of Kotori's older brother, Itsuka Shido, had been lost right as he was undergoing contact with the Worst Spirit, Tokisaki Kurumi.

A few seconds later, the appearance of a young boy was displayed on the main screen.

A body of medium builds and average height, while accompanied by swaggering footsteps. Although she couldn't see his facial expression due to his head inclining down, it was without a doubt Kotori's older brother—Shidou.

Although she didn't know if it was an illusion, it felt as if his clothes had become dirtier than from before. Moreover, Kurumi, who should have been with him, was nowhere to be seen. What on earth happened in the end?

"Anyway, let's carry out recovering Shidou first!"

"Yes!"

In response to Kotori's commands, the crew members all began to operate on their consoles.

So at the next moment, accompanied alongside a small driving engine beginning to move within <Fraxinus>, Shidou's figure on the monitor suddenly disappeared.

A few seconds later, as if to serve as a substitute, Shidou's figure appeared on the transport device installed above the internal bridge with faintly radiant light particles surrounding his person.

"Shidou!"

With her throat trembling, Kotori ran from the captain seat towards Shidou's side.

"Are you alright!? What the hell happened!? Kurumi——"

At that moment, Kotori, who was questioning him while grabbing against Shidou's sleeves, abruptly stopped her words.

As a result of being so close to Shidou, Kotori was finally able to see the expression on his face.

Worry, sorrow, and also quite a few regrets.

As is shaped by that—an expression filled with determination.

Indeed, in order to seal Kurumi's reiryoku a certain amount of willpower was needed to oppose her. However, the feeling Shidou exuded right now exceeded the faint degree of the madness and sadness of the mission at hand.

It was like—the obsession necessary to save someone even at the cost of one's own life.

With a burning radiance within his pair of eyes, Kotori felt overwhelmed for a split second.

"—Kotori."

Shidou quietly raised his head and opened his mouth.

"Can you gather everyone together? I want to tell you all everything. Right now, no—what has happened up until now. What Kurumi had done as well as what she did for me."

There was a mountain of questions she wanted to ask. Moreover, since Kurumi's location was still not confirmed, that was another piece of information they would want as soon as possible. Indeed, the usual Kotori would have certainly said, "Why are you putting it on airs?" and would urge him by force to continue speaking.

However, she decided not to press the matter. One can suspect it is because of the momentum of the conversation, but right now the current Shidou looked so full with misery that he would break down into tiny fragments if agitated further.

“.....Un, I understand.”

Kotori breathed in a sigh of relief before lowering her neck in defeat. After her mind was allowed to regroup from the deep breath, she issued the commands to the crew members.

“Shiizaki, gather all of the Spirits in the mansion. Minowa, please contact Miku, Origami, and Nia! Kawagoe, continue searching for a response from Kurumi!”

“Understood!”

Hearing Kotori give out her instructions without pause, the crew members all responded by simultaneously. Kotori gently nodded her head in consent before turning her gaze towards the left side.

“And also Reine, you should contact Mana—.”

—At that moment.

After speaking that far, Kotori furrowed her eyebrows.

Located in front of her line of sight, there was the figure of a single woman sitting in front of the console. She had long hair tied together carelessly and thick dark circles underneath her sleepy eyes. From the breast pocket of her Ratatoskr military uniform, there was the face of a stuffed bear with a stitch mark peering out a little.

<Ratatoskr>’s analytic officer and Kotori’s close friend, Murasame Reine.

“.....Um, understood. I’ll go contact Mana.”

Reine slowly nodded her head in response to Kotori.

There should have been no particular oddity exceeding expectations. Her appearance, voice, and response were all the same as usual.

But why? Kotori felt a strange sense of discomfort from that sight.

“.....Kotori?”

“——”

Hearing Reine call out her name, Kotori jolted her shoulders for a second.

“Ah.....sorry, please do that.”

Despite appearing seemingly nervous, Kotori lightly shook her head before returning her line of sight back to the original matter at hand.



—About an hour had passed since Shido was retrieved by <Ratatoskr>.

The briefing room set up inside the ship was dominated by silence.

In addition to Shidou, there were 13 people in this room. Tohka, Origami, Kotori, Yoshino, Kaguya, Yuzuru, Miku, Natsumi, Nia, Mukuro, and Reine and Mana alongside these Spirits. In addition, Maria, the management AI of <Fraxinus>, should have been watching this situation through the monitor screen.

Perhaps due to so many people gathering, no one uttered a single word since just a moment ago, with everyone remaining silent difficult facial expression.

Among them, Mana was comprehending, yet also unable to accept it, carving deep wrinkles near her eyebrow while folding her arms.

Even so, it couldn't be helped.

Everyone had heard. They all knew. Shidou had told everyone.

Of <Nightmare>—of how Tokisaki Kurumi became a Spirit and the reason for why she was willing to bear the ill reputation of being the Worst Spirit. And then, to save Shidou from the fate of death, repeatedly reset the world many times over again and again.

Shidou conveyed without any concealment, exaggeration, or falsifications. Her footsteps, her course of action, and of course—her grieving desire.

Naturally, it would be a lie to say that Shidou felt did not uneasy talking about this. Yet, in order to replay Kurumi for her deeds, there was certainly the need to discuss this with everyone.

But more than anything else—Shido wanted everyone to know.

The girl known as Tokisaki Kurumi had not simply accumulated countless heinous crimes for self-interest or pleasure.

Having unknowingly committed a fault while unaware, her made lofty determination made her chose a road filled with thorns in order to save mankind, friends, and the world.

.....Well, perhaps, Kurumi would loathe this becoming known by other people.

“Muu.....I never thought something like that happened to Kurumi.”

“How frightening.....”

It was Tohka and Yoshino who made the first initiative to break the silence. Both of them had eyes opened up into complete circles with sweat hanging down from their faces.

“.....It’s hard to accept something like that as true.”

At that moment, a young girl, with her hair tied in a single ponytail and teardrop like birthmark mole, spoke out in turn.

Takamiya Mana. A Wizard belonging to <Ratatoskr> and the self-proclaimed younger sister of Shidou. Her staunch eyes were now bewildered by doubt and confusion.

“That heinously cruel and rebellious beast in human form, whose character is to focus on the next premium set barbeque meal, that <Nightmare> wanted to save everyone? That bad joke hurts to even be laughed at.”

After finishing speaking, Mana gave an exaggerated shrug of her shoulders. However, that was only to be expected. Mana and Kurumi can be best described as mutual enemies that have had numerous confrontations up until now. Even if such an explanation was said suddenly, it would be impossible to simply accept it.

“Mana, I understand your feelings, but——”

However, just as Shidou was about to speak, Mana lowered her eyes and extended out the palm of her hand as if to stop him.

“.....That is to say, well, if compared to as higher than the probability of Nii-sama lying to Mana, I would have no choice but to believe it.”

After saying that, Mana gave out a mock sigh of relief.

“Mana.....”

“Oh, please don’t misunderstand. I only believe in Nii-sama’s words, so that doesn’t mean I intend to accept that woman.”

“.....That’s really confusing.....isn’t that the same thing. No, I can tell you also probably want to express.....”

Natsumi spoke out with sweat dripping down her head. However, Mana took no heed in this and continued to speak without seeming to care.

“Compared to that Nii-sama, putting this matter aside, there is another point I’m quite interested in.”

“Hmm.....what is it?”

As Shidou made a puzzled expression, Mana raised a finger and turned her eyes into a more serious gaze onto him before asking.

“When Nii-sama was supposed to be been experiencing <Nightmare>, Tokisaki Kurumi’s past—a women called *Takamiya Mio* appeared there.”

“.....”

Hearing Mana’s words, Shidou’s throat issued a small groan.

That’s right. Shidou was able to experience Kurumi’s past through the bullet of her Angel <Zafkiel>.

Amidst there, a girl named Takamiya Mio had appeared.

Moreover, that girl was obviously not an ordinary person. She had given Kurumi the Spirit Sephira Crystal to Kurumi to turn her into a Spirit and the power needed to hunt other Spirits. Kurumi’s bitter enemy, it can said that this existence is the cause for everything.

Additionally, it is expected that Mana would feel completely concerned about the matters involving this girl.

After all—*Takamiya*.

Mio had the same family name as Mana.

Moreover, the name *Mio* was something Shidou had once said when in the depths of a trance-like state from his reiryoku going rampant.

This was too much strange of a coincidence for a person not to take interest in.

“Ah.....I’m also concerned about this matter as well. Who the hell is this Mio person?”

“Giving Kurumi a Sephira Crystal to turn Kurumi into a Spirit, that sounds just like how <Phantom> appeared before us.”

It was Kotori who took it upon herself to answer Shidou’s question. She was resting on her arms and legs against a chair and moving the Chupa Chups stick in her mouth up and down.

<Phantom>. It was the name of the mysterious Spirit that had handed the Sephira Crystals to Kotori, Origami, Miku, and Nia, and Mukuro and turned them into Spirits. Just as Kotori had said, there were many things in common with Mio, who had appeared in Kurumi's memory.

"Is it a Spirit with the same power as <Phantom>, or is Takamiya Mio the identity of <Phantom>. If so, what is the end goal? Furthermore, what is her relationship to Shidou and Mana.....the mysteries keep coming one after another."

After saying that, Kotori shrugged her shoulders in a dejected manner.

As if continuing off, Mana lightly nodded her head before speaking.

"Of course, the possibility of having the same surname or that person using a fake name isn't zero. However, if thinking from the assumption that there is something interrelated, could it be a relative of me and Nii-sama? At the very least, it should be someone acquainted with me and Nii-sama."

Mana spoke out while caressing her chin.

Even if this meant failing to grasp at the main points, this was unavoidable. After all, both Shidou and Mana had lost the memories of their past as siblings together.

Although the DNA identification test confirmed the two of them as real siblings, the reason why Mana called Shidou her Nii-sama the first time was due to only her intuition and the picture in her locket. It was quite the rough reasoning.

"Hmm.....I'm not sure. That alone....."

As Shidou tried to mutter out a groan, Nia turned around as if becoming aware of something.

"Are? But listening to that story didn't boy call out Miochi's name? Isn't that a bit strange?"

"Eh? What's strange?"

“No, well hasn’t it been decades ago since Kurumin meet Miochi. If it’s a relative, it wouldn’t be surprising if it were your aunt or grandmother. But to call the name directly without an honorific, wouldn’t that cause a feeling of discomfort? Of course, it’s a different matter if boy’s personality was very wild before losing his memories——”

“Ah.....”

Having heard something that made sense, Shido could only scratch his face in response.

But, as if to make a sudden rebuttal, Origami quickly opened her mouth.

“Not exactly. There’s no doubt that Takamiya Mio is a Spirit or existence that has a similar power. In that case, it is possible that she encountered Shidou and Mana with the same appearance she had with Tokisaki Kurumi.”

“Ah——, as it is——. Certainty, before I was sealed, no matter how late I stayed up drinking; my skin was still as glossy as a hard-boiled egg.”

After speaking in a jovial manner, Nia caressed her face with both of her hands. Amidst the definite silence, Natsumi responded with a “.....right now?” Having finally received response at last, Nia sharply responded back, “Once in effect, the sweat in the corners of the skin are like sharp road turns used like racing techniques for the gutters.....what did you let me just say!” Such a natural tsukkomi routine was received completely through the natural socialization among the Spirits.

Looking on at the interaction, Shidou’s mouth formed a wry smile before once again giving out a small groan.

Even so, no matter how much he racked his brain, he still couldn’t arrive at an answer. That’s right. After all, there was too little information. Although, it would be a different story if Shidou and Mana were able to recall their lost memories——

“Hmm.”

As Shidou was deep in thought, he suddenly heard a lovely whisper.

Turning to the direction from where the voice came from, it turned out to be from one of the Spirits, Hoshimiya Mukuro. She was fidgeting with the coiled three braided long hair draping over her shoulders before also turning her line of sight towards Shidou.

“Truly tis a strange fable.” —Then Nushi-sama, if it is of great concern, then just simply recall it.”

Then, Mukuro replied back in an ever so nonchalant tone.

What innocent language said without guilt; really, if that was the case. For a split second, Shidou curled his eyes and made a bitter smile.

“Ahahah.....yes. If only you could remember it all of a sudden.....yet—”

However.

Shidou had finally realized the meaning behind Mukuro’s words.

Mukuro was neither joking nor misunderstanding what Shidou and the others were saying.

Quite literally, she merely straightforwardly expressed her opinion.

“.....Can it be done?”

As Shidou questioned back with a meek expression, Mukuro responded back with her consent as if it were a matter of course.

“Muku’s <Michael> is an absolute key. Things that are visible or cannot be seen, objects that are tangible or intangible, there is no difference in anything. There is no such thing that <Michael> cannot open without any distinction. —Even if that gateway is some stubbornly closed off memories.”

“.....”

Hearing what Mukuro had said, Shidou breathed out a sigh of relief.

The power held within Mukuro’s key-shaped angel, <Michael>.

It was an unrivaled angel with the power to literally *open* and *close* everything.

Certainty, with <Michael>'s power it may be possible to awakened the memories sealed within himself. Shidou placed his hand against his chest in an effort to suppress the sudden and violent throbbing from his heart.

No, it wasn't just Shidou. Side by side, each and every other Spirit looked on with a surprised or impressed expression while directing their attention towards Mukuro.

".....Shidou."

In such circumstances, the one who displayed the most striking expression was Kotori. With a grim face, she started intently at Shidou's hands.

There was no confusion or surprise within her expression—only mere tension.

It was as if she was already aware of the possibility of Mukuro's <Michael> but could not speak out.

"—Kotori."

Looking at her expression, Shidou quickly understood the reason for the uneasiness within Kotori's thoughts.

Even if everything went well and Shido reclaimed the memories of his past, it may not necessarily be what they are hoping for. After all, in the end no one here right now knows what happened in Shido and Mana's past.

Furthermore, there was no guarantee that Shidou would be able to keep his current personality after retrieving his original memories.

The current Shidou might get absorb into the personality of his previous self.....although one might scoff at reaching such a conclusion, they could not deny the possibility that restoring his past memories might affect him in some way.

—However.

“It’ll be alright. Since no matter what happens, I always am your older brother.”

Shidou spoke out as he made a sweat smile while stroking Kotori’s head.

“Onii-chan.....”

Overcome by emotion for a split second, Kotori’s eyes started to moisten.

However, remembering that everyone eyes might be on her, she quickly shook her head and breathed out.

“I-I’m not worried about you in the slightest. Something like that—of course.”

Kotori pouted her lips as her face was flushed with a red hue. Seeing that adorable and sorry appearance, Shidou could help but feel his strength even more empowered as he was caressing her head.

“Haha.....ah, so it’s like that.”

“Keke.”

At that moment, as if accompanied by a deliberate cough, Mana made a somewhat resentful expression.

“Ah, no. Not like that. Of course, wouldn’t it be that Mana is my cuter little sister.....?”

As Shidou hastily tried to give an explanation, Mana shrugged her shoulders as if saying “I understand”.

“It’s a joke. Mana also doesn’t want the idea of Nii-sama changing from his current self.”

However, Mana continued on.

“If you have a means of retrieving memories from the past, then I would certainly want attempt it. There’s nothing more I want to know like who Takamiya Mio is and what happened to me and Nii-sama.”

“.....Ah.”

Shidou seeing her boldly display her own determination, nodded to give his consent before lowering his eyes and slowly lifted up his right hand.

Afterwards, Shidou let out a gentle sigh as he began to concentrate his mind. Consciously feeling the power circulating throughout his body, it was similar to the sense of trying to channel everything into a single direction.

In accordance to Shidou’s will, the reiryoku sealed from the Spirits caused his body temperature to suddenly spike up.

Although it had been a struggle to grasp this feeling in the past, after the reiryoku went rampant, he had reached the point where he could control the power freely to some extent as long as he had the time and environment to concentrate.

“—<Michael>.”

Shouting from the depths of his throat, he called out the name of the angel. Then, as if in response to that voice, the heat circulating around his body exuded outward—a gigantic staff with a key-shaped tip manifested.

“Ooh.....!”

“.....<Michael>.....”

Shidou felt that the Spirits all breathed in a sigh of relief at the sight. Shidou took in another deep breath to calm down his heart, and then held onto the summoned <Michael> using both of his hands in attempt to pierce his own head with the key.

.....However, <Michael> was too large for the process to be done smoothly.

Looking at the comical scene, the Spirits tried to suppress a smile.

“Ugu.....”

“It would be difficult to be serviceable as it is, Nushi-sama. Since <Michael> is already in Nushi-sama’s hands, you should already know the power. <Tefetei> should be used.”

Then Mukuro extended out her fingers, speaking out just like an instructor guiding a disciple.

“<Tefetei>.....”

As Shidou repeated that word, it raised such a mysterious feeling. Even though he had never heard that word before, he felt like he already knew about it.

However, it wasn’t the first time he had felt this before. When using the angels of the Spirits, the knowledge of how to use that power would vaguely appear in his mind.

To be able to recollect matters that should not be know, such a strange sensation. Recalling the image captured in his mind, he once again called out the name.

“<Michael>—<Tefetei>.”

Then, with that command, the huge staff gripping against Shidou’s hands began to shrink in size faster than the naked eye could see until it was small enough to fit in the palm of his hand.

Indeed, this form was much easier to handle. Perhaps, Mukuro had also used this form when using the key to pierce her own head.

“Okay.....”

After re-adjusting his own breathing, Shidou slowly guided the key towards his own temple.

“—Then let’s begin.”

“Umu.....!”

“Don’t worry. Believe in <Michael>!”

“Ayan! To think that such a sharp pointed object will be entering inside Darling’s body!”

“.....Miku, you shut up for a moment.”

Hearing the Spirits converse with each other, Shidou let out a slight chuckle. The Spirits’ conversation helped Shidou loosen his shoulders just enough from the tension. He took in another deep breath before directing the sharp end of <Michael> into his own head.



—Completely white.

If you were to describe *it* in a word, that ought to be the expression used. From the perspective man of faith, it would seem no more illusion than mankind being punished by God. If a conspiracy theorist saw it, they would believe it was a nuclear attack from an enemy nation. Those who were tied to common sense would have thought of it as a hallucination or daydream. —In any case, such was the scene.

Explosion.

Yes, perhaps an explosion.....had occurred and passed.

However, within that boy’s mind, the impression and scale between *that* and an *explosion* was too great. As a result, it took time to find a word to match the description of that phenomenon.

Until a few seconds ago, he would have continued on with his ordinary everyday life.

Walking down the road towards the shopping district in order to purchase a book he wanted.

However, while walking on the paved road leisurely with each step, thinking about tonight's dinner menu, the vast street in front of him was suddenly surrounded by a dazzling light.

No, to be more accurate, including the district, it was a vast area roughly ten kilometers in size.

In an instant, with a tremendous roar, the surroundings were scrapped away by shock wave, causing his body to be blown away like a leaf in the wind.

"Gu.....ah.....!"

On the ground after his body struck against a collapsed fence, he uttered out anguished cry.

Soon afterwards, the shock waves that were causing the air to tremble subsided as the surroundings were filled with silence.

No, if spoken correctly, the roaring noise that resounded earlier caused his ears to temporarily deafen.

"Gu....."

After waking up and enduring the pain, the boy stood up after brushing off the pebbles and fragments of the building that had fallen on his body.

"What.....how.....what happened.....?"

The boy rubbed against his eyes and raised his head. Then—

"What—"

Looking at the vast scenery in front of him, he was left speechless.

Not what happened.

Just, there was nothing left.

The buildings, houses, cars, telephone poles, traffic lights, roadside trees, streets, and even—the people.

There was no component that would naturally be assumed when thinking of the word *town*.

There was only the ground that had been beautifully scrapped away and the violent winds.

Although it would be natural to assume that it was because a large explosion just occurred—but it wasn't the same.

Overcome by the intense uncomfortable feeling, he tried gazing at the sight once again with widen eyes.

Clearly, the amount of rubble was too scarce.

If this were caused by a collision of a meteorite, a bomb, a gas explosion, or the like, then there should be more wreckage lying around even if everything was destroyed.

However the rubble surrounding him was not caused by the explosion itself, it was the debris left over from the aftermath.

Whether it was the remnants of cars, fragments of trees—the corpses of people.

There existed nothing in the place where he thought was the hypocenter of the explosion.

Even so, looking out to the vast area that extended out to about 10 kilometers, there was no enormous substance or living creature that could be found anywhere.

As if—everything within that range had been erased.

“

No—the boy gulped as if trying to reject his own thoughts.

It was certainly abnormal, an unthinkable situation beyond mere common sense.

Although, if asked whether he or not had completely no knowledge about the phenomena, then the answer would have to be no.

—Spacequake.

A few months ago, a cataclysm of unknown cause opened a large hole in the Eurasia continent.

It was a major event of the century that was being vigorously covered by T.V and newspapers every day. Ever since then, public attention was directed towards the small scale spacequakes occurring throughout the world.

Right now, the sight spreading beyond his eyes look exactly like what he had seen before in a helicopter shot video.

“This is.....a spacequake?”

As he murmured astray, his body shuttered when looked over the sight again. Although he already knew that this was a great calamity unparalleled in humanity’s history, even if recognizing that the devil’s dice had been cast, it was impossible to understand how to approach a method for evading such a disaster.

Yet, when seen in front of his own eyes—and in a situation he might have been involved in had he left home a few minutes earlier—when that was pointed out, a sort of phantasmal sensation emerged as his blood began to surge.

However.

“.....!?”

In the next moment, his body began shivering from head to toe because of a feeling other than dread.

Farther ahead —on the newly formed crater in the ground, he saw something that resembled a small silhouette.

Normally, such a distance would be too far away for anything to be visible. This situation was only possible as a result of everything sheltering or obstructing one's sight had already been completely eliminated.

Although it was hard to believe that someone had survived that explosion, the possibility of someone now crawling out after taking shelter underground wasn't null.

"Tch....."

If spoken truthfully, he didn't want to step into the epicenter where the large explosion had occurred. After all, the cause of the explosion was still unknown and there was no guarantee that another explosion might occur again.

However. Perhaps, that person is hurt. Perhaps it wasn't possible for that person to move from that spot. —The moment that thought flew into his mind, his feet automatically began to move forward.

He ran a straight line directly into the area of death that used to be overflowing with the activity of people just a moment ago.

While considering the need to check on the status of that person as soon as possible, he might even have to carry that person away from here as well. That fretful feeling caused him to move his legs faster than usual.

—However.

"You there! Are you alright—"

Despite not knowing how far he ran, he finally arrived at a distance where that image of that figure could be seen clearly. Yet, at that moment, his foot instinctively froze at that spot.

“Eh——”

From his throat, a voice semi-consciously leaked out.

The reason was extremely simple.

On the ground where everything else had been annihilated, there was a naked girl squatted down.

That existence nailed him in place at that spot.

Sight,

Attention,

And even his heart,

——In the blink of an eye, it had all been taken away from him.

She is so,

Unparalleled

Transcendent,

A girl so beautiful to the point of being even unreasonable.

“Y-you are.....”

“

After listening to the boy’s words, the girl slowly raised her head as if noticing his existence for the first time.

——Thump.

His heart tightly contracted.

“

The girl's lips slightly moved.

The boy, that voice—



“.....You are.”

Such a voice was heard amidst a hazy consciousness.

It took a few seconds before he realized that voice was coming from his own throat.

“Eh.....? Strange, here is.”

As the blurry image began to focus, his eyes saw a familiar room. Apparently, he was lying on the infirmary room onboard <Fraxinus>.

“...Aaah, looks like you've woke up, Shin.”

At that moment, a voice that didn't belong to him echoed in the room. Shidou raised his jaw and turned towards the direction that voice came from.



“What.....!?”

He couldn't help but stare with eyes forced open.

It seemed that Reine was standing beside the pillow he was reclining on. Although from Shidou's perspective, her ample bust was on full display right in front of his face.

“.....Hmm? What's wrong?”

“Ah, no, it's nothing.....”

While his cheeks were turning red, he awkwardly turned his head away. After that, Shidou turned to see the Spirits who were inventively watching over him as he was lying on the bed.

“Shido! Are you okay!”

“Please.....don't force yourself.”

With faces full of anxiety, the Spirits rushed towards Shidou's side as they opened their mouths to speak one by one. Shidou quickly replied back in confusion.

“W-what, what's going on, what happened?”

“What's the matter; you scared me when you suddenly collapsed!”

“Consent. After inserting <Michael> into his head, Shidou mumbled something momentarily before collapsing.”

“Eh.....”

Listening to what the Yamai Sisters were saying, Shidou slightly tilted his head —issuing out an audible “ah” sound.

That's right. Just as they had said, Shidou's recollections were abruptly disconnected the moment he inserted <Michael> into his head.

“Ah.....sorry for making you guys worry.”

“No, it’s good that you were able to wake up right up away.”

“Right, I’m glad that nothing too serious happened.”

“Truly, with my kiss even sleepy beauty can awaken.”

“Eh.....!?”

In front of everyone, Origami suddenly spoke out such outrageous words nonchalantly, causing Shidou’s eyes to startle open in fright.

However, Kotori immediately smacked the side of Origami’s head gently.

“What are you talking about? Shidou, don’t believe this!”

“Please wait and let me finish speaking. There are numerous molecules floating around in this space. It isn’t wrong to say that the particles I’ve breathed out will necessarily touch Shidou’s lips. In other words, there’s no problem done even if it is an indirect kiss.”

“!? W-wait a minute professor! That means between me and everyone in this room just now.....!”

“Are tied together in a situation of deep kissing.”

“To think there is such talent among people! What results the scientific community must be achieving!”

It seemed that Professor Tobiiichi’s ground breaking theory was attracting the approval and excitement of fellow researchers. Kotori could only place her hand against her forehead and sighed at the sight.

In the meanwhile, there was young girl shrinking her shoulders back apart in regret. —It was Mukuro.

“Mu.....”

“Mukuro?”

Hearing Shidou replied back, Mukuro’s body slightly trembled before she found it in herself to continue to speak.

“.....My apologizes, Nushi-sama. Muku was the one who recommended using <Michael>’s power.....”

After speaking out, Mukuro let out a remorseful facial expression filled with guilt.

Shidou let out a sudden sigh before straightening out his body upright as if to say “it’s alright!”.

“Look, as you can see, there’s nothing wrong. This isn’t Mukuro’s fault. Originally, I was actually feeling a little bit sick from a lack of sleep this morning.”

“Nushi-sama.....”

As if perceiving Shidou’s intentions, Mukuro slowly nodded her head. Looking at that appearance, the Spirits all felt their own expressions relax down a bit.

Then, a few seconds afterward, as if waiting for everyone to finish talking, Mana’s voice was heard from the corner of the room.

“—So, I hate to ask while Nii-sama isn’t feeling that well, but how did it go?”

“Eh?”

“I’m asking about the results from using <Michael>. Although I can tell that your personality hasn’t changed.....did you remember anything?”

“.....”

Hearing what Mana had said, everyone slightly gulped. The gazes of all of the Spirits focused intently onto Shidou’s body at the same time.

Mana's question was quite sensible. In the first place, Shidou had used <Michael> on himself to find if there was a clue about *Takamiya Mio* in his lost memories of the past.

And there—Shidou had observed.

Memories that both belong and did not belong to himself.

A pre-existing scene that should not have been seen or known before.

“Aah, that's.....”

However, Shidou paused speaking at that moment.

He did not want to pretend with the intentions of concealing his memories as a secret from everyone else.

Just simply stated—he could not accurately recall what he had seen.

“Ahh.....it's strange. For sure.....I saw something.”

Placing his hand against his forehead, he let out an audible groan. Not matter how much thought he racked his brain with, it was impossible to disperse the fog lingering in his mind and condense what he had seen into a conceptual image.

If he were to make an analogy, it felt just like waking up from a dream. It was certainly more vividly clear a while ago when asleep. However, the moment he woke up, that world crumbled like sugar confectionary. The leftover fragments remaining in his head resembled the feeling of searching for the vestiges of memories contained within a lost dream.

“.....Damm, what the hell. How can be possible to forget something like this.....”

As Shidou was gripping against his head, someone suddenly placed a gentle hand against his shoulder. —it was Reine.

“.....Calm down, Shin. Don’t be fretful; there must be another method you can consider.”

“Reine-san.....”

As Shido raised his head to look around, he found that all of the Spirits in the room were nodding their heads in agreement one by one.

“That’s right, Shidou. There must be some other way.”

“.....Well, it’s merely zero after reverting back to zero, so there’s no need to mind it, isn’t that so?”

“Hey, boy sure is an expert at making others worried.”

“.....Ah, that’s right. Thank you everyone.”

Hearing what everyone had said, he responded back with a relived sigh. To be honest, Shidou still felt tormented by a sense of helplessness and mild degree of self-loathing, but he couldn’t let the others become worried about such a demeanor. Shidou used both of his hands to pat down his cheeks to invigorate himself as he raised his head with an “alright” mental shout.

“That energetic looks suits you better Nii-sama. —For that matter, I have a proposal.”

Mana spoke out while raising a single finger. In response, Shidou slanted his head in confusion.

“Proposal?”

“Yes, that angel that was just used a moment ago—you called it <Michael>. Can you also try to insert it inside Mana’s head?”

“Huh.....?”

Hearing what Mana had just said, Shidou stared out with open dumbfounded eyes.

However, he quickly caught on to the meaning behind Mana's words.

It wasn't just Shidou who had lost his past memories; Mana's memories of the past had also been sealed.

At the same time, as Shidou's biological little sister, there might be information about *Takamiya Mio* in her memory as well. Certainty, the proposal sounded reasonable.

"So that's the reason, indeed....."

But at that moment, Kotori stood up to intervene between Mana and Shidou

·
"Yes, yes, we'll try again next time. For now, shouldn't we wait for Shidou to recover first?"

"Eh? No, I'm already....."

Just as Shidou was trying to say something, Nia, who seemed to aware of something, interrupted him.

"Yes, yes, since boy should take a break after already taking it out once. It's no good to keep pressuring boy because he's still young Manatee. Ah, I mean about the angel."

After hearing something like that, Shidou covertly turned his gaze the other way.

But then, in-between awkwardly staring at the ground, he caught a glimpse of Nia's expression. —soon afterwards, he picked up on what the two of them were thinking.

"Ah....."

Certainty, Mana's memories had been sealed.

However, with that sealed memory, it not only contained the information about *Takamiya Mio* that Shido desires, but also contains memories of when

Mana had been kidnapped by DEM and the magical modifications subjugated on her body.

Although it was unclear how she was treated, it must have certainly been a pleasant experience.

As there is no guarantee that <Michael> can unlock only selective memories, it seems better to avoid using it on Mana.

“.....That’s right, sorry Mana, is it possible that we try it next time?”

“Hmm.....”

As Shidou replied back, Mana gently stroke her chin and raised her eyebrow to a ^ shape.

Although it seemed that she didn’t fully understand Shidou’s intentions, but she was probably aware of the reason by now. Mana took in a deep breath as her hands fluttered around.

“I understand. Okay, if Nii-sama says so, let’s do that.”

Mana spoke out as if surrendering and withdrawing her request.

As always, she was young girl with a thoughtful and straightforward temperament. Although Mana looked like a junior high student, her prudence and dignity were just like an adult. Honestly, it was difficult at times to determine who the older sibling was.

“Aah.....sorry, Mana.”

“No, it’s my fault for pushing forward such difficult demands.”

Kotori let out a sigh of relief in response to what Mana had said. This younger sister as well, with a mental acuity much faster than Shidou, was also a reliable commander.

“Well, let’s take a break now. This time the feeling of “I think I saw something” remained. If there’s no problem, let’s monitor your brain waves while using <Michael> next time. Perhaps then we can figure this out.”

“Aah, please do so.”

After Shidou replied back, Kotori nodded her head in consent and clapped her hands against each other.

“Alright, let’s clear out now everyone. There’s no way Shidou will be able to rest if it is this noisy.”

“It’s all right, I’m confident that I’ll be able to relax now.”

“Yes! I want to sing a lullaby song.”

“Yes! I want to sketch boy’s sleeping face.”

“The three of us can provide surveillance when needing to use the restroom.”

With half-opened eyes, Kotori pushed the others Spirits to depart from the infirmary.

Shidou smiled wryly while looking at their backs leaving the room. Then, feeling more relaxed and calm now, he returned back to lie down on the bed.

“.....Takamiya, Mio.....”

As he muttered that named, Shidou raised his hand towards the ceiling and then slowly moved his fingers one by one to clench into a fist.

—Only one thing.

Yes, there was only one thing that he had neglected mentioning to Kotori. He didn’t purposely falsify the information he gave. It was true that he couldn’t remember the contents, even though there was the sensation of seeing something.

But—why?

Every time he heard the name Takamiya Mio, who should have not existed in his memory, being called out.

There was the sensation of his heart tightening.

“

Shidou quietly lowered his hand and covered his body with the futon before closing his eyes.



“

Sitting down within a chair in a company room, Ellen Matters was fidgeting with her legs while having an impatient look on her face.

She has pale Nordic blonde hair and a pair of blue eyes resembling the collective moonlight. As young as she is, it's difficult to imagine her having a daunting title like DEM Industries' Second Executive Director. She was beautiful girl with an appearance resembling an alluring enchantress.

But the beautiful aspect of these feature were now distorted unpleasantly by excessive stress.

The cause is obvious.

“—Hey, are Ellen and Otou-sama childhood friends?”

“How was Otou-sama like when he was younger?”

“Say, isn't Artemisia hard to pronounce? Isn't there a nickname?”

“What would be good? Arumi?”

“Hahahaha.”

“Ellen, what kind of shampoo do you use?”

“Ah, there’s split ends on your hair.”

.....Etc.

The inside of the normally quiet office room had been competently transformed into the gossip and chatter of an all-girls school’s classroom. As a rough estimate, there were over 20 girls noisily clamoring about.

With pale-blue eyes and dark gray hair, all of them inconceivably shared the same appearance.

<Nibelcol>, by relying on the power of the Demon King, <Beelzebub> and DEM Industries’ superior craft, pseudo Spirits had been brought into existence.

Those girls, all with the same appearance and voice, threw out pointless chatter from all directions before gossiping on to the next topic. Moreover, they’ve been acting this way every day since they were born. For Ellen, who couldn’t be too severe in response, this was indeed an unbearable environment.

“.....<Nibelcol>, is there something else you can do more quietly?”

As Ellen finished impatiently, a <Nibelcol> replied back with a dumbstruck expression as if not knowing what they were being told.

“Eh? I’m just having an ordinary conversation.”

“Hey, isn’t that the feeling you get when you’re getting old.....”

“Are you on the brink of hysteria? How—scary.”

“.....”

Faced with the <Nibelcol>’s incessant noise, Ellen unnervingly twitched her eyebrows in frustration.

Then, sitting on the opposite of her, Artemisia extended out the palm of her hand as if trying to appease Ellen.

“Now, now.....they don’t appear to be saying anything with ill intent.”

“That’s the issue here. Children that aren’t disciplined are no different than a monkey. You have to look at the results rather than if there is malice attached.”

In response to Ellen’s indignant tone, the <Nibelcol> pouted their lips in dissatisfaction.

“What’s with that tone? It looks like Ellen seems to be the one with the issues.”

“That’s right. We’re just chatting normally, so there’s nothing wrong with that.”

“There should be a limit on how much you envy those younger than you.”

“If you didn’t have the realizer manifestation device, then you would just be an ordinary person.”

“Bean sprouts director——”

“! Wait, who the hell made up that last nickname.....”

As Ellen made a rattling sound by jolting up from her seat, the <Nibelcol> all smiled happily at the sight, laughing out “Kya ha” while skipping and fluttering around inside the room.

“So it’s to this extent——”

Speaking out, Ellen prepared to invoke the realizer manifestation device—but suddenly stopped just the occasion before the launch.

The moment Ellen got up, the door flew open as a man came into the room.

The man gave the impression that all of the world’s darkness had compacted itself into a human shape. He has dusky ash colored hair and a pair of eyes resembling metallic rust. Although he looked about thirty years old, the oozing

sense of intimidation and dread he was emitted wouldn't match that assumption.

Sir Isaac Ray Pelham Westcott, the king of magicians who had established DEM within a single generation.

“—Aah, it looks like everyone has already gathered just in time.”

“Otou-sama!”

The moment they saw him approach, all of the <Nibelcol> in the room flocked around Westcott all at once.

“Have you finished your work?”

“Hey, listen Ellen here is being terrible.”

“Yeah, we haven't done anything wrong, but she's throwing false accusations at us.”

“She'll throw a hissy fit at the slightest inconvenience in her life.”

“Her appearance is a bean sprout, but her brain is like a gorilla.”

“Who is.....!”

This time she couldn't restrain herself. With a roar, an invisible voluntary territory expanded from Ellen's body, tightening the body of a <Nibelcol> that was close at hand. The <Nibelcol> let out a painful cry before fading away. After that, a single worn out piece of a paper floated down onto the ground.

That is to say, Ellen did not alter her body with the realizer materialization device. The girls originally came from pages from the Demon King book <Beelzebub>. Once life activities were terminated, they will naturally revert back to their original form.

Nevertheless, the <Nibelcol> were all one part of a single whole collective. As a life born from magic, their concept of the *individual* is vague, with the total memories and personality shared among each other.

For Ellen, this degree does not fall under *death*. It was a sensation similar for her to lightly tap her fingertips against something. In fact, the rest of the <Nibelcol> did not lament over their companion's annihilation, only merely turning a discontent expression towards Ellen.

"Kya, how horrible."

"I can't believe it."

As if returning to before, they continued to make a noisy commotion to complain. Ellen turned a sharp gaze towards the others.

However, at that moment, Westcott opened his mouth and spoke out in a very composed tone.

"Calm down, Ellen. There's no need to reduce the number of allies, right?"

".....Ha, I'm sorry, Ike."

After saying that, Ellen released discretionary territory. Although her frustration against the <Nibelcol> had not been put to rest, what Westcott had said was also reasonable.

Westcott exposed a thin smile before walking towards where that piece of paper fell down on the floor—reaching out to touch the object that was just a <Nibelcol> just a moment ago.

The moment after that touch, the paper emitted out a faint light just before a girl suddenly appeared from within the sheet. —It was the exact same <Nibelcol> that Ellen had strangled with her territory just earlier.

"Blee!"

The <Nibelcol> quickly pulled her tongue out towards Ellen before retreating to behind Westcott.

""

To tell truth, Ellen felt the desire to strangle her again, but somehow she managed to calm down those thoughts by taking a deep breath in.

Ellen cleared her throat out with a cough before turning her gaze towards Westcott.

“.....So then, Ike. What did you want to say?”

“Aahh.”

As Ellen spoke out, Westcott nodded his head as if remembering something. Then, he immediately raised his right hand, summoning a lacquer black book there.

Demon King <Beelzebub>, the omniscient Demon King that Westcott had stolen away from a Spirit.

“Although it took some time, I was finally able to investigate the reason. —Sure enough, <Nightmare> was hampering by already knowing our attack plan.”

“.....What do you mean?”

“It means that <Nightmare> had already been informed about when the attacks will occur.....no, to say it more accurately she had already experienced it before. On top of this, she’s been overturning a pre-known event and avoiding the fate of Itsuka Shidou’s death—though depending on the power of the Angel of time <Zafkiel>.”

“What.....”

Hearing what Westcott had just said, Ellen unintentionally knitted her brows downwards.

However, she soon understood immediately: the horror that is the power of an Angel. If viewed as impossible, it would be denying meaning to the very same thing resting on Westcott’s hands right now.

“.....So that’s it. This is tricky. Then no matter how we move, the other side will find a way to counter it?”

“Hmm. After all——”

“That girl was acting strange, as if she had already predicted the time when we would appear out.”

“Hey, otherwise, it would be impossible for Ellen to be the reason that we failed.”

“.....Today’s pests surely don’t know their place, shall I bring out the insecticide?”

As Ellen glared at the <Nibelcol>, they all cried out “Kya! Otou-sama, I’m scared!”, as they all tightly hid behind Westcott.

“In short, as long as <Zafkiel> is in <Nightmare>’s hands, we’ll always return to a situation of losing the initiative.”

“That surely the case—but well, that’s also a disadvantage.”

“May I ask what do you mean by that?”

As Ellen asked, Westcott raised the corners of his mouth.

“For us, it has only been a few times repeating combat, but for <Nightmare> it should be well over a hundred times. Repeating the same events again would make the mind exhausted beyond imagination, even more so each time being forced to watch the death of a dear friend.”

“.....”

Having heard this, Ellen envisioned repeating an endless trial and error to avoid having a beloved from being slaughtered.

—Even the strongest Wizard Ellen was left shivering in fear. For <Nightmare>, Tokisaki Kurumi to have endured that kind of thing up until now, it was enough to sincerely respect her despite being an enemy.

“.....Does that mean we’ll have to wait for until <Nightmare gives up?”

“Well, I suppose that’s certainly the case. Then it’s only a matter of time, it wouldn’t be too much trouble to wait.”

Even so, Westcott continued on.

“In this way having eternal time will be all the more terrifying. After repeating thousands of times, she will still not be able to see through our plan and come up with a solution. In that case, in order to let her give up as soon as possible, we have to do use our full strength.”

“Full strength?”

“Aah, quite literally. —Mobilizing all of DEM Industries’ resources to completely decimate Itsuka Shidou. Even if <Nightmare> already knows what will happen, it will be to the extent of being absolutely impossible to prevent from occurring. Her hopes and ideals, everything will become severed.”

After saying that, Westcott’s smile grew darker.

Immediately afterwards, several pieces of paper fell into the room from the ventilator exit attached on the ceiling.

As the worn out sheets of paper flutter in the air, they emitted out a faint glow just before touching the floor, having already transformed into the appearance of a girl. —Needless to say, all of the figures were <Nibelcol>.

“Otou-sama, Otou-sama, quick look.”

“We caught this.”

After speaking out, the <Nibelcol> presented what they held behind their hands in front of Westcott.

Looking at that sight, Ellen faintly narrowed her brow.

“.....”

“This.....”

Right beside her, Artemisia also widened her eyes in surprise.

But that was to be granted, since that <Nibelcol> was holding out a freshly decapitated head of a girl.

Raven black hair styled with uneven distributions, porcelain white skin, and a clock like pattern protruding out from the left eye that had remained unclosed. Since not much time had passed from when the head had been freshly decapitated, blood was oozing out from the incision made to detach it from the neck.

Such distinctive features were truly unforgettable. —Tokisaki Kurumi, the Spirit <Nightmare> that they were talk about just until now.

With the power of her Angel, she can create clones made from her own past. For those that were sneaking around here, perhaps their goal was reconnaissance or assassination.

“Ho, what a meritorious feat, <Nibelcol>.”

As Westcott gave his praise, the <Nibelcol> let out a cheerful and bashful “eh” sound. It might have even resembled a cute interaction between parent and child were it not for the blood from the severed head dripping on her hands.

“But several of them that grouped together managed to escape.”

“If that’s the case, then Otou-sama’s conversation might have been overheard.” The <Nibelcol> spoke out with a look of guilt on their face. However, Westcott merely smiled as if not minding at all.

“I don’t mind, as long as <Zafkiel> is in her hands, she’ll find out eventually. Let’s assume that both <Nightmare> and us mutually know each other plans before going into all-out warfare.”

Westcott spread out his hands in a playful manner before lifting his chin up to look onto the sky.

“I wonder if there is a single one remaining here. <Nightmare>’s vanguard, if you are still here, there is something that I would like to tell your master.”

Then, he continued on while keeping his devilish smile.

“I will kill Itsuka Shidou.

No matter how many times you go back.

No matter how many times you reset the world.

No matter how many times you revise history.

I will do it so thoroughly so that you will never be able to overturn it.

Well, try and fight it if you can —Worst Spirit.”

Although there was no voice to respond to the declaration, for some reason Ellen felt that the shadows entrenched around them were faintly shaking in anger.

Chapter 2: Nightmare's Secret Maneuvers

“.....Oh no, this is bad, this is really bad.”

Inside his own room at home, the boy flung out his arms against his head in distress.

Yet, that was to be expected. As for the reason why——

“.....Mu.”

From his peripheral vision, boy gently shot a glance at the corner of the room——towards the direction of the bed.

To be precise, he was looking at the girl sitting on the bed.

“

A girl, so beautiful to the extent that she looked handcrafted, was looking at the room back and forth with a dazed expression. Although she was wearing the jacket the boy had on earlier, she was not wearing anything underneath that. Every time she moved, he could catch a vague glimpse of her dazzling and glossy skin.

That's right. It had been an hour since that mysterious explosion.

The boy had inconceivably brought the girl found at the center of the explosion back to his room.

“.....No, no, no.”

The boy shook his head back and forth in an attempt to deny the dangerous thoughts roaming in his imagination.

It can't be. It absolutely did not come from a motive fueled by a guilty conscious. It should be owed to a force majeure.....otherwise there would be no alternative out of this incident.

While the boy was repeating such excuses within the interface of his mind, he vaguely remembered what just had occurred an hour ago.

(——A, are you alright? Did you get hurt?)

On the ground level where it seemed civilization was in the midst of the brink of collapse, the boy's sight was snatched away by a girl who looked just like a goddess or angel. After at last slipping out from his paralyzed state, he issued out a question. Of course, he tried to look away in order to avoid seeing the girl naked.

Although it was not clear who this girl is, the only definite thing was that this situation was beyond normalcy. He considered his first priority to confirm the status of the miraculous survivor.

Although the girl noticed the boy's voice, she only responded by glancing back at his line of sight, slowly casting her eyes onto his face without speaking a single word.

(Un.....)

The boy, while staring at those gem-like eyes, felt his face grew more and more red.

Then, the girl finally opened her lips.

(....., Ah.....,um.....)

However, this level certainly could not qualify as speech. A groan——no, this did not come from any pain, but rather from a slight shiver of the throat.

(.....? S-say, can you not speak.....?)

The boy furrowed his brow as he pondered this thought over.

——Perhaps she could not say anything due to the shock from the explosion.

Her not wearing any clothes might also come from being involved in that explosion; well, he didn't think that it was too unreasonable. Though, after

having said that, her skin showed no traces of any scars.Or she was a special girl caught by a secret society of evil. The scenario of being placed naked within a cylindrical pod was often seen in Sci-fi works like this. The previous explosion was due to an experimental failure by this clandestine group and she, while being trapped underground, happened to escape by chance.....

(.....Ah, it really doesn't matter why already.)

The boy shook his head to discard the phantasmal story that had developed in his head. Then he removed his outer jacket in order to cover the girl.

Indeed she might catch a cold at this rate——more than anything else, in a holy sense, he could not endure remembering her nudity exposed to the elements

(.....!?)

The moment the coat landed on her shoulders, the girl's eyes jolted in surprise, with her entire body beginning to tremble slightly.

(Ah, s-sorry, did I scare you? But this way it really is.....)

As the boy flustered out a defense in a hurry, the girl's eyes flickered while blinking as she began to pull on the coat hanging down her shoulders.

(.....)

Eventually, after she seemed to understand that it was something warm, the girl made a relaxed expression.

(U-umm.....Can you walk? No, it should hurt to walk barefoot, right? If you don't mind, I can carry you. Anyway let's clear out from here. Do you know where your house is.....)

(.....?)

Hearing the boy's words, the girl stared at him with a startled look.

(.....Did you not understand?)

The boy scratched his face while making a wry smile; then, he bended down to squat next to the girl.

——Such were the events leading to the present.

“This is different. It’s different.”

The boy murmured out as if trying to appeal to someone.

The boy initially wanted to bring the girl to a hospital. However, while carrying the girl, he soon walked a few blocks forward towards a building still standing. There, he found that the town had fallen into a quagmire comparable to the end of the world.

It was a matter of course if thought calmly. Since without any prior indication, a space ranging of tens of kilometers had been desolated. Shock waves emanating from the fringes also destroyed the surrounding environment, resulting in a huge number of casualties. As a result, the nearest large hospitals that should have accommodated for them were also flattened by the previous explosion.

With the situation being in such a state of mayhem, the boy thought for a moment before deciding to choose his own house as a refuge for the girl to take a break in. There ought to be nothing strange with this decision.....or at least that is what the boy had kept telling to himself.

Although the boy’s house is a family of four, his parents had been away from home for a long time now due to a business trip. There shouldn’t be any issues with resting here for the time being——

“——Nii-sama! Are you alright!”

At that moment.

Accompanied by a loud voice, the door to the room was vigorously pulled open.

Looking closely, a girl had come rushing in. Her defining characteristics were her hair tied together in a single ponytail and a beauty mark resembling teardrop. Although today was supposed to be a day off, she probably had come back from club activities. She was wearing a black sailor fuku while carrying her backpack in one hand and a bamboo sword bag in the other.

Having probably made a furious dash to return back here, large beads of sweat were dripping down from her forehead while her shoulders were shaking up and down.

“——Mana”

As the boy responded back by calling out her name, he breathed in a sigh of relief seeing that his little sister was safe.

“.....Eh.”

Then, he immediately held his breath afterwards.

Since calming down after seeing the boy face, his little sister's expression was blinking with an astonished tint.

However, this reaction also isn't impossible of not being comprehended.

There was a half-naked girl in her older brother's room, even if it were not her; anyone else would display the same expression.

“Y-you know, Mana, this is.....”

“.....”

Mana looked alternatively between the boy and girl's faces. Then, after a moment of silence, she slowly walked towards the boy. “Pon!” She gently placed her hand against his shoulder.

“.....It's alright. Mana is Nii-sama's ally. Afterwards, make sure to properly atone for your sins later.”

“What do you mean, that's completely not alright!?”

He could not help but raise his voice above an unbearable cry; however, it didn't seem that Mana was listening. The boy shook his head as he attempted to unravel the misunderstanding.

"Wait, wait! Why is it like this! Even if misunderstood, it should at least be
"Kya, Nii-sama brought back a girlfriend home, how rude of me to barge in!"
Shouldn't it be like that!?"

"It's impossible for Nii-sama to do such a thing! Don't make light of your little sister!"

"You sure are asserting your views onto me!"

"Well, then wouldn't what you said earlier be the same thing?"

".....That's different though."

"Look, this doesn't look like precisely as what one sees!"

Confronted against Mana's interrogation, he replied back while diverting his gaze. In response, Mana angrily took a deep breath before talking out her favorite bamboo sword from her bag, Dorōmaru (actual name), against the boy. As he hurriedly raised his hands in a panic, the bamboo sword stopped mere inches from his forehead.

"Confess honestly! Where did you kidnap her from?"

"Hey!? T-this is a misunderstanding! I only brought her back here because she was alone!"

"Aaahhhh, then what you are saying is the same thing as kidnapping her!"

"I thought so too after doing that, aaaahhh!"

He responded back to Mana's outcry with his own scream. Certainty, when pressed against, the literally meaning behind his judgement had truthfully leaked out.

“A-anyway, listen to the story! This girl.....she was at the scene of the explosion!”

“.....Eh?”

As the boy shouted out his defense appeal, Mana finally loosened her grip on the bamboo sword.

“What the heck is going on?”

“That’s it. When I was caught up in the explosion earlier—I found her.”

The boy briefly described his encounter with the girl and clarified the circumstances that brought them here.

After listening, Mana made an “hmm.....” sound as if gesturing in deep thought while quietly glancing at the direction of the girl.

“To be sure, if considering Nii-sama has not struck his head or seen a hallucination.....”

“Ah, you’re still considering the possibility of me lying.”

“Nii-sama wouldn’t tell Mana a lie, since you’re Mana’s Nii-sama.”

As the boy was about to stagger out a sentence, Mana replied back in a pronounced manner.....it really seemed that it was impossible to determine whether or not this little sister believed in her older brother.

“Anyway, if you think with that premise, there are too many abnormalities. Who is that girl and why would she be at such a place?”

“W-who knows?.....Even if I were to ask such a thing.”

As the boy replied back with a troubled face, Mana sharply focused her line of sight at the girl.

“.....Could it be that this child caused the explosion? Is that possible?”

“Ha.....? D-don’t be foolish, there’s no way a human could have done——”

“——Achoo”

Without noticing earlier, the boy and Mana heard a lovely sound coming over from the bed.

It seemed that the girl had let out a sneeze. Speaking of which, although the girl was dressed in the coat, she wasn’t wearing any clothes underneath that.

“A-are you alright?”

“Aah yes, what are you going to do now Nii-sama? It can’t be helped. Mana will bring some of her clothes, so please wait——”

“.....A-ah.....”

At that moment.

Just as Mana was about head to her room, the girl stared intently at Mana while her nose was sniffing.

Then, at the next moment, light particles surrounded the girl as a sailor fuku, with the same design as Mana’s, materialized onto her body.

“Wha.....?”

“Huh.....?”

After being faced with such a supernormal phenomenon occurring right in front of them, the boy and Mana looked at each other with stunned expressions.



“.....Gaah!”

Feeling a strong blow against his abdomen, Shido forcibly jolted his eyes awake.

“Eh.....! Huh.....!? W-what’s happening!? An attack!?”

As he failed to react in a brief moment, the whites of his eyes spun out in alarm.

Immediately, he soon realized that there was a familiar figure standing upright on his stomach.

After a few seconds, as his brain gradually woke up, Shidou finally understood what happened to him.

“Ah, wake up——. That’s no good Onii-chan. You should already be use to this. Shouldn’t you pay a little more attention to this kind of thing?”

While saying that, Kotori, who was standing on top of Shidou, gently used her fingers to brush her hair that was fluttering around while being tied down by the white ribbon.

It seems he had been violently woken up by Kotori again. In his carelessness, Shidou was slightly surprised due to this not having happened recently.

As he looked around, he was greeted by the familiar appearance of his own room. That’s right. Shidou was currently not sleeping on an infirmary bed onboard <Fraxinus>, but rather in his own room in Tenguu City.

After resting a bit in the infirmary for a while and then eating with everyone, he returned back to ground level.

“Kotori.....”

“Hey——”

“Uguu——”

Kotori kick off from Shidou’s stomach to make a graceful landing on the floor. At the same time, because of the impact, Shidou let out a brief scream as his body curled up in pain.

“Y-you, ah.....Can’t you wake me up more gently every time?”

“Mu, saying it like that is misleading. It makes it seem like I jumped onto Onii-chan without warning. No, no, it’s not like that. After trying to wake you up properly, if that plan doesn’t work, isn’t it inevitable to follow up with this step? I think there’s a problem on Onii-chan’s side if you’re still asleep in this situation.”

“For the time being then let me listen, what exactly did you do to wake me up at first?”

“On the staircase, I made footsteps with even more strength than just now.”

“.....That attitude is not even worth of recognition of being a wasteful by-product.”

As Shidou mixed in a sigh while speaking, Kotori did not seem to notice the meaning behind his words and merely gave out a “hey, I was praised” expression alongside a bashful smile.

However, as if remembering something, she narrowed her eyes before staring directly at Shidou.

“W-what’s the matter.”

“Um——no, it seemed to me that Onii-chan was muttering “Mana.” “It’s a misunderstanding.” “Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte.” What on earth are you dreaming about? Why was it Mana and not me?”

“No, what was that last thing!? I said that!?”

He did not expect for even his own voice to betray himself. He hurriedly tried to recall the dream that he had just saw. However, Shidou couldn’t remember anything no matter how hard he tried digging up his memories, especially regarding that last word.

Watching Shidou in such a perplexed state, Kotori let out an “ahaha” laugh.

Apparently, it seemed to have been only a joke. Shidou let out a relieved sigh.

“.....Ah really, so what time is it now?”

As he spoke out, Shidou reached to grab the smartphone beside his bed. The bright sunshine was already gleaming past his window. Although he did not agree with Kotori's wild method of waking up, he had certainly been asleep for longer than usual.

“.....Eh, nine O'clock!? Is this for real, school has already begun!”

After staring at the screen of the smartphone, Shidou winded his eyes in surprise. He quickly jumped out of the bed in a panic, planning to make a dash out of the room.

However, from his side, Kotori suddenly grabbed the edge of his sleeve, hindering his progress forward in the process.

“W-what is it Kotori?.....That being said, you should also hurry to school. At the very least to catch up before the second class period——”

“.....Ha.”

As Shidou finished, Kotori breathed out a heavy sigh.

Then, after swaying her head from side to side in state of disappointment, she pulled out a familiar black ribbon from her pocked and restyled her hair with such skillful movements.

This was how Kotori switched her peculiar method of thinking. While an innocent girl when wearing the white ribbon, switching to the black ribbons she changes to become the dignified commander of <Ratatoskr>.

“——What the heck are you panicking for, Shidou. It can't be because you're planning to go to school, right?”

“No, of course not.....eh, mm? Is today a day off?”

Due to how chaotic the days have been recently, his memory of the week had become somewhat unreliable. He looked at the phone screen again.....However, it wasn't a special day off, but rather a usual school day.

Consequently, Kotori sighed once again before continuing to convince Shidou.

“Hey, are you still asleep now? Right now your life is being targeted——no, if you believe in Kurumi, then you should already be dead, right? Why bother going to places where security is lacking and you are liable to be harmed.”

“Ah.....”

Shidou’s eyes narrowed upon hearing those words.

It was exactly as stated. Although checking the time caused his body to reflexively move, there shouldn’t be any priority for school during this emergency.

“Sorry.....but.”

Still.....there was one matter. Despite being in full agreement, there was still one matter of concern left at school for Shidou.

“Kurumi.....she might be there. If that’s the case——I have must go.”

That’s right. Certainty, Shidou’s was being targeted by the large organization called DEM and could not tread lightly as a result.

But the same time, Shidou was in the process of trying to capture Kurumi. Moreover, Shidou still hasn’t been able to say a single word of gratitude to Kurumi. If perchance Kurumi came to school to see him, he couldn’t ignore this.

Kotori, who seemed to understand Shidou’s feelings, sighed and nodded her head in acknowledgement.

“Yes, I’m also aware of this. For our part, we cannot idly sit by with the matter regarding Kurumi. ——Even now, several self-automated cameras have been dispatched to the school from <Fraxinus>. If they capture Kurumi’s appearance, then I’ll permit a special case for contact. Of course, in order to avoid the risk of going to school, you’ll be dropped directly down to school from <Fraxinus>.”

“Ah.....thank you. I can’t thank you enough.”

After saying that, Shidou lowered his head to bow to Kotori. Kotori awkwardly scratched her cheek while shyly averting her eyes.

However, at the next moment——

“Ara, ara, how pleasant, for you to exhaust so much effort for *me*.”

“Ha——”

“Eh.....?”

Suddenly, an unexpected voice was heard from the right side, causing Shidou and Kotori turned to the source of the voice at the same time.

Although unknown for how long, they both saw a figure of a girl emerging over there.

With brilliant black hair and porcelain white skin, her legs up to her knees were immersed inside a shadow entrenched beside the bedside.

“.....Kurumi!?”

Her face could never be mistaken. In a stunned state, Shidou had involuntarily called out her name,.

No——that wasn’t quite right. Shidou stood breathlessly as he watched her figure slowly emerge from the shadow

The person here was indeed Tokisaki Kurumi. There was no doubt about that. However, Kurumi, who was now in front of both of them, wore a rose hair ornament instead of having her usual hairstyle. Her choice of clothes resembled Gothic Lolita style ——most of all, her left eye was covered by a medical eyepatch.

He was quite familiar with those particular outward characteristics. This was the Kurumi he had meet when traveling back to the world of 5 years ago—— and also the clone who had, a few days ago, told him the truth about Kurumi.

“Ufufu, greetings Shidou-san, Kotori-san.”

After completely emerging from the shadows, eyepatch Kurumi elegantly lifted the hem of her skirt for a small curtsy forward.

However, even when given such an attentive greeting, Kotori did not relax her vigilance at the slightest. She pursed her lips open to speak and directed her line of sight onto that girl amidst the intense tension.

“Good morning, Kurumi. Aren’t you dressed quite lovely today?”

“Ufufu, you are sure skillful in giving a compliment, Kotori-san. Although you’re not blood related, as expected of Shidou-san’s little sister.”

Kurumi exposed out a graceful smile. Confronted with this backhanded compliment, Kotori began to feel slightly annoyed.

“.....Still, haven’t you violated proper etiquette? For you to rush into someone else’s home without permission.”

“Ara, ara, that really was quite rude.”

In response to Kotori’s words, Kurumi bowed down her head in apology. However, Kurumi immediately afterwards let out a bewitching smile before continuing on.

“Although it can be used to apologize, I can inform you of two important pieces of information to compensate.”

“.....Important information?”

As Kotori narrowed her brow in surprise, Kurumi made a “yes, yes” remark while stroking her fingers against her lips in a lustrous gesture.

Then, she spoke out her words in a quiet manner while staring intently at both Shidou and Kotori.

“On February 20th, 4 days from today, DEM will devote all of its efforts towards killing Shidou-san.”

Having heard that utterance, it stirred feelings of excessive despair.

“.....Wha?”

It was not as if he hadn't recognized the meaning behind those words. However, Shidou was rendered dumbstruck over abruptly being informed of plans to kill him.

“.....What do you mean?”

Beads of sweat fell down Kotori's cheek while she kept her attention on Kurumi. Meanwhile, Kurumi lowered her eyes downward before continuing to speak.

“What's going on, even if you ask that, it's just what that means. As the world's top manufacturer of the realizer manifestation device, the organization possess the strength of the world's strongest Wizards, the intelligence capabilities of the all-knowing Demon King, tens of thousands of automatic dolls, and countless Pseudo-Spirits. It's the same thing as saying that they are trying to pour all of that for the sake of killing—— a single person.”

“What.....”

Shidou was left at a literal loss for words.

Certainty, DEM had been so far aiming at Shidou's life and according to Kurumi's words; they have actually killed him numerous times now.

However, this was no more to say than an *assassination*, where the elimination of Shidou's life occurred while their own side was not prepared.

However, what Kurumi had just described was a show of overwhelming force dedicated to annihilating the enemy——with that description, it merits being

called a *war*. No, if Kurumi had not just provided that information just now, Shidou probably would have been butchered without any resistance. With that in mind, it would have been more accurate to describe it as unilateral *slaughter*.

“——And then.”

With Shidou being completely unable to speak, Kotori, crossed her arms with a grim expression before interjecting.

“Why did you bother conveying that thankful message, Kurumi? ——What on earth is your goal?”

“Ara, ara. What heavy suspicion, Kotori-san. I’m only worried about the safety of Shidou-san.”

“Hmm.....”

Kotori narrowed her eyes as she glared at eyepatch Kurumi in an attempt to ascertain her true motives.

Faced with the ambivalence exuded by Kotori, eyepatch Kurumi forced out a bitter smile.

“It seems that Kotori-san has a slight misunderstanding.”

“.....Misunderstanding?”

“Yes, yes.”

Eyepatch Kurumi nodded her head while continuing to speak with a somewhat artificial tone, as if she was rehearsing for a play.

“The one here right now is a doppelganger, *me* ——the one that you call the real Tokisaki Kurumi does not know this. I chose to divulge that information under my own personal discretion.”

“Huh.....?”

“What did you say?”

Both Shidou and Kotori’s faces were flushed with a bewildered look. That was natural, the eyepatch Kurumi standing in front of them was a temporal clone made from Kurumi’s past. Generally, they were supposed to be the vanguard that moves in accordance to the original Kurumi’s instructions.

Eyepatch Kurumi, who seemed to find the reaction of both of them slightly amusing, slightly turned her face around before continuing to speak.

“Me intends to deal with this matter through only *myself*. ——Cycling and repeating back numerous times in order to secure a future where Shidou-san survives.”

“.....”

“However, the actions of *me* has become known to the enemy. ——Therefore, this all-out war, this battle for absolute annihilation that will take place. DEM’s strategy is not only killing Shidou-san, but also crushing the aspirations of *me*, who has the power to cross through time.

A surprise ambush, a clever and malicious scheme, a trivial tactic that cannot be subverted, a steel-fisted tempest. Deus. Ex. Machina., a name befitting the concept of a god of the machine, a dominating military tactic on the chessboard that forcibly leads the story to its end.”

“.....I see.”

After a full empty beat, Kotori spoke out to break the silence.

“That is to say, the reason you came here was to tell Shidou to take refuge.....is that right? Let <Ratatoskr> protect Shidou while you Kurumis go to fight.”

As Kotori finished, eyepatch Kurumi placed a finger on her chin and let out an “ah——well.....” as if pondering over something.

“It would be certainly appreciated if you do so, but that alone isn’t the correct answer.”

“.....? Then why did you go behind the real Kurumi’s back to tell us this?”

As Kotori inquired with a frown, eyepatch Kurumi exposed a prankster-like smile.

“It’s a simple reason. Even though *me* is doing her best, it’s a waste that Shidou-san doesn’t even know that he is being protected.”

After saying that, she clicked a flirtatious wink at Shidou. While somewhat surprised, Shidou responded back with a wry smile.

“.....So that’s it.”

“Well.....it’s better to be honest than have a botched up excuse. If the real Kurumi were like you that would be a big help.”

As Kotori crossed her arms and threw out somewhat harsh words, eyepatch Kurumi giggled as if finding that amusing.

“Ufufufufu. My apologizes. *Me* is a very stubborn person.——However; the desire to protect Shidou-san is sincere. Ah, please understand at least that.”

“Hmm.....after saying something like that, I won’t have to worry that you’ll attempt to seize Shidou’s reiryoku behind our backs?”

“.....Ufufu.”

After Kotori said that, eyepatch Kurumi neither made an excuse or justification, merely only a quiet smile.

Afterwards, while swaying her skirt, she quickly retreated to the corner.

“——Now then, my purpose here has been fulfilled. Please be sure to stay alive for *me*, Shidou-san.”

After saying that, eyepatch Kurumi slowly fell in to her own shadow, continuing to sink deeper inside.

“Kurumi!”

Just before eyepatch Kurumi completely disappeared, Shidou hurriedly cried out from behind her.

“Yes? What do have to say, Shidou-san?”

Eyepatch Kurumi, who had been emerged into the shadow up to her waist, turned around to respond to the call. It almost looked like a girl bathing in a lake..... well, the fact that the lake had a pitch black color gave a slight ominous feeling.

He cleared out his throat while looking directly at eyepatch Kurumi’s eye.

“Thank you for coming here to inform me just now. If possible can you also convey a message to Kurumi from me? ——Thank you. It’s thanks to you that I’m still alive right now. I’m deeply sorry I couldn’t express my appreciation beforehand. I’ve also heard what you are trying to do right now. I can’t thank you enough for protecting me. But.”

Shidou sharpened his gaze with a flare of determination in his chest before continuing to speak.

“——Although I’m sorry, I still have mettle as a man, so I cannot accept your help. So after neatly resolving the matter of DEM, then I will surely stand in front of you once again to seal you reiryoku.....no, not like that.”

Shidou closed his eyelids for an instant before suddenly opening them again.

“This time, I’m going to snatch away your lips. Please be prepared for it, my honey.”

Right afterwards, he felt hampered by a great deal of embarrassment from having said that.

“.....”

For a few seconds, eyepatch Kurumi could only stare blankly at Shidou.

“.....U-fufu.”

Finally, it reached the point where she could no longer bear to suppress her laughter.

“Ahahahahahahaha! So that’s the reason.....how cleverly said. *Me* really is a blessed person.”

After laughing for a while, eyepatch Kurumi was finally able to calm down while wiping the tears in her eyes.

“.....However, that truly is a harsh request, Shidou-san. Like what was mentioned before, I came here in secret from *me*. To convey that message would be tantamount to confessing an arbitrary action done on my own initiative without prior consolation. Disobedient limbs that move at their own leisure must be eliminated. Do you want me to die?”

“Ah.....”

After hearing that, Shidou widened his eyes in alarm.

Just as precisely as she said those words, he lowered his panicky head down in apology

“S-sorry, I didn’t intend for it to be like that.....”

“Yes, yes. I did not think someone as gentle as Shidou san would consider something like that.

“——However, although this life is insignificant, it would undoubtedly be scattered as a stepping stone for *me* if there is the event of reckless behavior. Although I’m sorry, I cannot guarantee conveying that message.”

“.....Un, that was my bad.”

As Shidou finished speaking, eyepatch Kurumi turned around and began to giggle.

“Ahaha. Truly such an outrageous person——Your words, has it yet to be decided if I should wager my life to convey that message to *me*?”

After pleasantly saying those words for the bottom of her heart, eyepatch Kurumi faded away into the shadow.

“.....”

“.....”

Soon after, silence filled the entire room.

Both Shido and Kotori were quietly in thought while gazing at the spot where eyepatch Kurumi had disappeared into.

“.....Hey, Kotori.”

“.....Yeah.”

As soon as Shidou opened his mouth, Kotori quickly replied back as if anticipating the reaction.

“It’s just as you say, Shidou. It would be a disgrace to <Ratatoskr>’s reputation if we handed everything over to a Spirit.”

Kotori then took out a single Chupa Chups from her pocket, rotating it with her finger before throwing it into her mouth.

“——Kurumi, DEM, let’s show them properly our method of doing things.”

◇

“.....”

While sitting on a bench in the lounge area of the aerial ship <Fraxinus>, Reine looked at the sky without saying anything.

That’s right; it was the *sky*. Instead of using materials reserved for construction walls, the lounge area was overlooked by tempered glass that offered a high degree of transparency. As a result, the blue skies, with its hazy clouds and glimmering rays of sunshine, were reflected onto the ship.

This airship, driven by the realizer manifestation device, relied on the voluntary territory to protect the hull of the ship. The importance of body armor was less compared to a more conventional warship. Therefore, even if it cost some battle strength, it was considering the possibility of accommodating the Spirits for a long time in case of an emergency. As such, rest areas like the comfortable lounging area and other entertainment areas were available on the ship.

.....As such, although placed for reasonable motives, in the end it was ultimately provided for because Kotori and Elliot Woodman like to *play around* in such recreational spaces.

Nevertheless, it wasn't automatically a bad thing. In the first place, aerial warships and the realizer manifestation device were originally impossible to exist in this world.

——The phantasmal realizer manifestation device, which was beyond human comprehension, was brought about through the existence of Spirits.

In this manner, it would be perfectly justified to provide such a space for the Spirits. Indeed, the Spirits who visited here after the renovation of <Fraxinus> were very excited to see this scene.

“.....Fuu.”

Besides——it wasn't as if Reine disliked this place either.

She gently sighed, leaning on the bench while looking at the sky.

Afterwards, she took out the stuffed bear plushy from the pocket of her <Ratatoskr> uniform and lifted it high, high, up in the air with both hands.

“.....”

Then, she started intently at the tiny bear with sky as a backdrop.

The plushy had endured the test of time. Although its style was still very cute, due to the traces of stitches on its body, it resembled a zombie or Frankenstein's monster in appearance.

“.....One more left, no.....two.”

Reine silently muttered to herself.

Immediately following her whisper, the communication device in her pocket gave off a slight vibration.

“.....Un.”

Reine supported her body back up and switched out the bear plushy with the communication device in her breast pocket. Then, immediately upon hitting the call button, she heard a familiar voice.

“——! Ah, Analytic officer Murasame. It's Shiizaki.”

It came from one of the crew members onboard <Fraxinus>, Shiizaki. From the tone of her voice, she could hear a slight degree of tension and anxiety. It seemed that something had happened.

“.....Un, what's wrong?”

“Emergency situation, please head to the briefing room. ——This morning, Tokisaki Kurumi appeared before Commander and Shidou-kun and told them that DEM is preparing an all-out attack. Our next step is holding a conference to plan out countermeasures.....”

“.....Fumu.”

Reine raised her brow while stroking her chin with her other hand.

DEM's all-out assault. The possibility was not out of their expectations. DEM's leader Isaac Westcott possessed the Demon King <Beelzebub> within his grasp. It was only a matter of time before they saw through Kurumi's secret maneuvers in crossing the time barrier.

“.....Understood, I'm heading there now.”

“Ah, thank you.”

After finishing the conversation with Shiizaki, Reine pressed the button to end the call.

Then, after putting the communication device back in her pocket, she then stood up from the lounge bench.

“.....Is it coming, *magician*.”

As Reine spoke out ever so silently, she let out a narrow sigh.



There were several figures currently within the conference room onboard <Fraxinus>.

Inside the center of the room, there was large round table where the commander, Kotori presided over. Left from that starting point, Shidou, Tohka and the other Spirits were all seated in position one after the other. On the opposite side, there was Kannazuki, Reine and the other crew members of <Fraxinus>.

At the center of the room, the letters spelling out the name *Maria* was on display for every direction.

Kotori had requested for everyone to come here to discuss countermeasures against DEM.

Although Shidou and Kotori originally didn't want to get the Spirits involved in this matter, the situation was so dire that they couldn't even say such an opinion. After all, DEM was intending on using all of their power to kill Shidou. With their inferior numbers, it would be impossible for <Ratatoskr> to not count the Spirits among their fighting force. —More than anything else, if they held such a conference without the Spirit's knowledge, their mental state would likely be destabilized.

In the past, there was the option of withdrawing the Spirits from the conflict by withhold information.....However, the existence of the Spirit known as

Tobiichi Origami made this indefinitely harder. Even for <Ratatoskr>, it would be impossible due to her superhuman instinct and technological capability to eavesdrop on every conversation from behind the scenes.

As a result, the Spirit · Human Countermeasures Meeting was formally announced. After looking at everyone from the circle, Kotori gradually stood up from her seat.

“——Thank you for gathering here, everyone.”

As the clear sound of Kotori’s voice reverberated through the conference room, everyone turned their attention onto Kotori’s direction.

“I think everyone here has already heard the story. ——This morning, Kurumi appeared in front us, leaving information that DEM industries is planning a large scale attack. Their purpose is——the inversion of the Spirits through killing Shidou.”

“.....”

After listening to what Kotori had said, all of the Spirits and crew members took in a deep a breath.

“Of course the possibility of Kurumi lying isn’t zero, but from this current situation the creditability of this information is not low. As for <Ratatoskr>, we cannot delay creating countermeasures as soon as possible. ——Maria.”

“Yes.”

In response to Kotori’s command, the clear voice of a young girl resounded through the speakers set around the room. It was the <Fraxinus> management AI · Maria.

“——The first option that can be considered is to evade DEM’s attack and evacuate Shidou and the Spirits to a safe place. Since <Ratatoskr> has bases all around the world, there should be no shortage of alternative locations. However——”

“Yes, the opponent has the omniscient Demon King <Beelzebub>. Even though it has not been able to demonstrate its full performance due to Nia’s jamming, if he focuses solely on Shidou’s whereabouts, he should still be able to find us.”

“Exactly, the thief has truly plundered a troublesome Demon King. If someone had been a little bit more firm, this situation wouldn’t have turned like this.”

Maria’s words came out mixed with a slight sigh. It was full of human warmth that went directly against the excessive calculating power of an outstanding artificial intelligence program. Despite only having the letters on the screen flash, it honestly felt as if a girl had spoken while shrugging her shoulders.

“Hey——hey——this is really embarrassing, sorry, sorry——”

It was Nia who peevishly sulked while using both of her hands to support reclining down her chin. Originally, Westcott’s Demon King <Beelzebub> was a part of Nia’s Angel <Rasiel>.

Needless to say, it was snatched away due to DEM’s exceedingly sinister scheme, and should not be blamed on any misconduct or negligence on Nia’s part.

Although everyone had already known this.....for some reason, Maria had spoken to Nia in a particularly barbed manner. Nia, who was initially struck by such a reaction, gradually regained her composure and narrowed her eyes while fluttering her hand in the air.

“Well, even if said that much, things won’t change. Let’s talk more constructively.”

After telling Maria to change the conversation, Nia stuck out her tongue, making a “blaa!” sound just like an elementary school child.

Despite Maria seeming a bit frustrated, she may have felt that arguing further would have meant lowering down her mental age, so she continued on as if nothing had happened.

“Since a withdrawal strategy is ineffective, there are two remaining moves. One of them is——negotiation.”

“.....Well, that’s not really too realistic.”

Faced with what Maria had said, Shidou replied back with sweat dripping down his face. All of the Spirits also nodded their heads in concurrent.

Well, that of course couldn’t be helped. The adversary was the natural enemy of Spirits, whom had brought their blade against them numerous times now. Moreover, since their purpose is to kill Shidou and inverse the Spirits to seize the Spirit Sephira Crystals. Thus, there was no probability of negotiations with <Ratatoskr>, whom was aimed at protecting the Spirits.

“Muu, saying it like that——”

As Tohka spoke out while stroking her chin, Kotori gave a firm nod of consent.

“Yes, there is only one option remaining, that is——to beat down DEM.”

“.....!”

After hearing what Kotori had said, a sudden burst of tension filled the briefing room.

At the time of being foretold of an attack by DEM.

Then, at the time of being called into this room.

That choice had been floating around everyone’s mind for a while now.

However, when explicitly stated by Kotori as a commander, all vague suspense, thinking, probability was overshadowed by a single fact brought into reality.

“Of course, I understand that this is not a simple task. Although our side has a slightly better performance with the realizer manifestation unit, the other side possesses an estimated ten times more our size in Wizards. When the <Bandersnatch> and <Nibelcol> are added, it’s difficult to image how much more the gap has widened. If they all advance for their purpose without concern collateral damage or causing a social scandal, it would be difficult to stop them.”

“.....”

Caught in the moment, everyone stood breathless. However, Kotori did not blame them for that. Rather, she nodded her head to show her sympathy.

“However, we have to fight. Although the decision to attack is sudden, the enemy has already striven to crush our escape route numerous times now. The result has been Shidou’s deaths for over 200 times now.”

“Muu.....”

As Tohka tightened her lips, the other Spirits also all showed a stringent expression.

“Without Kurumi, our story would have already been over with the worst ending of Shidou’s death. —And now, the enemy intends to take the next by also defeating Kurumi. Kurumi may not be able to necessarily redo the world again the next time Shidou dies. We have no other choice but to go on the offensive, seize tomorrow with our own hands.”

“—Exactly. Well said, Commander Itsuka.”

Suddenly.

As Kotori was amidst of her passionate speech, an unexpected voice was heard coming from the speakers.

This wasn’t Maria’s voice. The low reverberated sound no doubt belonged to an older gentleman.

“Ah.....”

Looking at the monitor at the center of the round table, Kotori widened her eyes in surprise.

With the same look, Shidou also flushed his face in astonishment.

Up until now, only the words spelling *Maria* were shown, but now it also displayed the image of an old man wearing spectacles.

“Woodman-san!”

Shidou could not help but call out that name. That’s right; this person was the decision-making body of <Ratatoskr> and chairman of the Round Table, Elliot Woodman himself.

“Hello, long time no see everyone. I’m sorry I couldn’t contact you until now.”

“No, don’t say that. Is your body feeling better?”

“Ah, it’s fine now. It looks like I made you worry.

Woodman let out a smile and pushed his glasses upward as if to change the conversation topic.

“Well, although I would also like to have a leisurely chat, it seems that the current matter at hand does not allow for this. ——I have a rough grasp on the situation. Needless to say, we intend to provide as much of <Ratatoskr>’s cutting edge technology as possible. However, the absolute *quantity* of the enemy cannot be subverted. If there is a direct conflict, we will eventually be defeated.”

“That.....”

“When he heard that, Shidou felt the urge to bite against his own lip.

But soon, Woodman continued to speak.

“——However, DEM industries is an organization entirely governed through Isaac Westcott’s charisma and Ellen Mather’s execution power. In other words, if we remove the two of them, no matter how many wizards or automatic dolls remaining, it will no longer be large problem. His organization grew too much; it is no longer a sturdy monolith anymore. If those two people disappear, the anti-opposition party within the company can clean up the rest.”

“.....!”

Hearing what Woodman had said, Shidou took in a breathtaking gulp.

However, the quickly understood it still was a tremendous difficult task to begin with.

In any case, the opponent was the man who had gained the power of a demon king and the world's strongest Wizard. In the case of the former, he was also shielded by a myriad of <Bandersnatch> units and <Nibelcol>, making even a creating a direct confrontation exceedingly difficult. Although the target had been narrowed down, a method to handle the enemy's overwhelming forces had not changed.

However, at that moment.

"——I see. Then, it may be worth trying that."

From the speaker, Maria's voice echoed through the briefing room.

"Huh.....?"

"Maria? What did you mean by that?"

As Kotori inquired in a surprised tone, Maria replied back without skipping a beat.

"I would be troubled if there is too much expectation and I do not have any definite evidence at all. This is at best a speculation as to whether it will be realized or not."

"Don't try and sell it off. What are you thinking about?"

Kotori spoke out while anxiously tapping her fingers against the round table. Then, Maria replied back with a voice that sounded as if she was letting out a large sigh.

"If this is true, it may be possible to neutralize the <Nibelcol>."

".....!? Wha——"

After hearing what Maria had said, Shidou could not help but let out a cry from his throat."

Of course, Shidou was not the only one to give such a reaction. The Spirits and crew members all raised their eyes in astonishment.

However, among them, there was one person who did change her facial expression.

“——Is that really true, Maria?”

Origami's composed voice blew through the turmoil of the shaken crowd. In response to that, Maria replied back from the speaker.

“Uhuh, it's true. Although, I not sure if it can be realized by including that point among them, but.——”

“That is enough considering the current situation. ——If this goes well, I may have a solution for the rest.”

“.....!”

Everyone poured their gaze onto Origami. Shidou, not being an exception, also turned his attention to the same direction.

“Origami? What did you just say.....?”

When question by Shidou, Origami placed her hand under her chin as if deep in thought before continuing to speak.

“It will certainly be difficult to achieve this goal. However, if Maria is able to hamper with the <Nibelcol>, then I have an idea of how to handle the <Bandersnatch>.”

“What did you say.....? What the heck is that!?”

As Kotori asked questions with astonished eyes, Origami gave a slight nodded before opening her mouth to speak.

“<Bandersnatch> is a very new weapon for even DEM. Although the concept has existed for a while, there had been no realizer manifestation device with sufficient performance to realize that ambition.”

“.....! That’s it, <Ashcroft ·β>! They must rely on that ultra-powerful realizer manifestation unit to bring about that result!”

It was Mana who had reacted to what Origami had said. She made an exaggerated clap with her hands before placing her fingers against her forehead to further contemplate on what had been said.

<Ashcroft ·β>. Shidou thought that name sounded familiar. He vaguely remembered that Kotori had once said that DEM had built a new realizer manifestation device of the same name, which considerably shortened the technological gap between <Ratatoskr> and DEM.

However, he still didn’t quite know what Origami and Mana were thinking about. Shidou slanted his head while that question floated in his mind.

“W-wait a second. What is the matter with that realizer manifestation device?”

“That’s right. Only the two of you understand right now, please explain. —— Maria as well. What exactly can we do to weaken the <Nibelcol>?”

Seeing a perplexed look on Kotori’s face, the characters spelling out *MARIA*, at the edge of the screen where Woodman was projected, lit up.

“Yes, I will clarify it now. In the first place, the <Nibelcol> are a pseudo lifeform created by DEM’s technology and composed primarily of reiryoku from <Beelzebub>. Assuming that is the case ——”

“.....! Stop, stop! Wait a second!”

Just as Maria was about to present the main focus of her thesis, it came to abrupt halt due to Nia interrupting in a panic.”

“Nia?”

“What is going on? Even if your pervious life was a pig, please stop making abrupt strange noises.”

Maria let out a faint, but also scathing remark.

However, Nia did not express even the slightest blow of mental shock or irritation. Rather, she kept her serious expression spoke out while waving her finger.

“Oririn, Manati, and 2D heroine from an eroge, can we stop this discussion here?”

“Why?”

“That’s a strange thing to say when we’ve obviously came here together to share information.”

“First of all, I’d like an explanation for that last name designation. Depending on the answer, I’ll drop you out of the airship.”

As Origami and Mana both gave a puzzled look to Nia, the letters spelling out *MARIA* on the screen were violently flashing as if to express her anger.

In response to the three of them, Nia shrugged her shoulders, keeping in tone with her mischievous manner of speaking.

“Well, I would love to know if there were any difficult to deal with strategies, right? But who do you think wants to know that information the most in the world?”

“.....?”

As Shidou felt bewildered over what Nia had just said——

“! Ah.....”

However, the moment he became aware of the meaning of those words, his shoulders began to tremble.

Origami and the others probably had noticed as well. Each person showed a different response from slightly pursing their brow to tightening their lips.

That’s right. Presenting their strategy here would be synonymous with Westcott being able later to search that information through <Beelzebub>.

Judging from everyone's reactions that her intentions had been properly conveyed, Nia gave a subsequent nod.

"That is the situation at hand. Of course, I've applied jamming to prevent the instantaneous obtaining of information from <Beelzebub>——but it is still possible that the threat still remains. Only *events from the future* and *people's thoughts* cannot be read. If we want to make a reversal in combat, then it's best to not even talk to your allies until the war has begun."

"....."

Although Nia was speaking in a relaxed tone, there was a uniform degree of tension displayed on everyone's facial expressions.

Of course, perhaps the enemy could even eavesdrop on the current conference.

Despite everyone knowing it mentally, there was still no corresponding feeling of realism. "We cannot discuss strategy at a war meeting." It felt just like trying to pulling a cart before the horse.

In an attempt to shake off the stiff atmosphere, Nia continued on in an enthusiastic demeanor.

"Well, I guess it's not a simple thing that can be done easily. ——Still, I would expect that our excellent AI-sama can at least handle something of this level, right?"

As part of her habitual retaliation, Nia replied back without hiding her sarcastic tone in the slightest.

"....."

Maria remained silent for a moment before the audio file let out a solemn "ha" sounding sigh.

".....Although it's a bit regrettable, it's true that you saved us for potential harm, Nia."

“Ahaha! You ought to know! Straightforwardness is a virtue for children. Isn’t that right standing picture AI-chan?”

“.....Yes, Nia. Could you please touch the console on the table?”

“Huh? Like——this?”

Following Maria’s instruction, Nia placed her hand on top of the console.

Then, at the next moment, accompanied by the crackling sound of an electrical spark, Nia leaped into the air on the spot like a cartoon character.

“Gyan!?”

It seemed that a light current had flowed through to the console. With tears in her eyes, Nia was slowly exhaling on her left hand in attempt to cool it down.

“W-what are you doing——! This kind of manners after having your failure pointed out is not adult-like at all——!”

"What are you talking about? I have frankly reflected on this incident and paid tribute to Nia. The shock was just a reasonable retaliation against me for making a fuss and chatting me off."

“Uwa——! Quibbler——! You’re the quibbler king——!”

Despite Nia continuing to complain, Maria had chosen to simply take no heed to it anymore. Although there were only 6 English letters on the screen, it felt that they could only see a girl with a scowl on her face.

While watching such an interaction unfold, Kotori could only helplessly shrug her shoulders.

“——Anyway, as far as strategy is concerned, it’s just as Nia had said.”

“If we discuss the details here, the enemy will be able to find the corresponding countermeasures. Origami, Mana, sorry but please devise the plans for the <Bandersnatch> on your own. For the moment, we’ll also share

information on Maria's countermeasures for the <Nibelcol> just before the war begins."

"Understood."

"Well.....there's no other way to handle this."

As Origami and Mana nodded in consent, Kotori responded in the same manner before turning her attention to the screen displaying Woodman.

"——That seems to be it. Sir Woodman, does this seem to be okay?"

"Ah. I appreciate the calm response. Let me also do everything I can in my possession. Please look forward to it. It's truly been regrettable that I haven't been able to talk to everyone for a while."

As Woodman replied back in a jesting manner, his words seemed to have an alleviating effect on the facial expression of Kotori and the others.



"——Any words to justify yourself?"

Kurumi coldly stated while aiming the muzzle of the short pistol at the clone.

"Ara, ara, I do not understand what you are asking about?"

The clone directed her line of sight elsewhere while the pistol was still directed against her. The purposely blunt and foolish manner of response caused blood vessels to protrude from Kurumi's forehead.

Although it was a clone, the individual with the pistol pointed against her was not exactly the same as Kurumi.

To be exact, while they share the same body and face, her hairstyle and selection of clothes were different than that of Kurumi.

A Gothic Lolita dress decorated with a rose hair ornament and a stylish eyepatch covering her left eye, this was the Kurumi from five years ago, who has a complex consciousness from various circumstances.

Although it was a clone with a history of many problematic behaviors, it seemed to have continued to act with privately intentions this time as well.

Kurumi aligned the muzzle at her chin, while making a frustrated groan from her throat.

“Please do not be so foolish. The other *me* has already reported it. I’ve heard that you told Shidou-san and Kotori-san about DEM’s assault.”

“Other *me*. Was that sort of thing reported? Wow, there seems to be no trust here. How sad, it makes me want to cry.”

“I did not consider that sniveling would be a tactic commonly employed by *me*.”

As Kurumi narrowed down her gaze as she finished speaking, eyepatch Kurumi stuck out her tongue to extraordinarily provoke Kurumi’s nerves yet again.

Whether or not she bothered to notice the reaction, eyepatch Kurumi proceeded onward in the same honest tone.

“However, I don’t understand what is wrong. Is informing Shidou-san truly such a terrible thing to do?”

“.....That matter, I was intending to inform later through another clone. It’s important to be conscious of being targeted.”

After Kurumi finished, eyepatch Kurumi’s facial expression brightened as if she were saying “sure enough!”

But, Kurumi sharpened her gaze while still pointing the pistol towards eyepatch Kurumi.

“However, the purpose of doing so was to urge Shidou-san to take refuge. It’s especially meaningless to incite a person whose life is targeted onto the battlefield. Moreover, to say such unnecessary things.....!”

“Eh——, what is this unnecessary thing——?”

“T-that is.....”

“And, even if you tell them, do you honestly think Shidou-san and Kotori-san’s actions will change. Or does *me* have something in mind to convince Shidou-san to run away.”

“.....”

Faced against eyepatch Kurumi’s argument, Kurumi could only remain silent.

It was regrettable, but she was right. Itsuka Shidou would never turn his back if he knew about Kurumi’s actions. No matter how she would phrase it, he would not attempt to escape.

Eyepatch Kurumi ought to be aware that Kurumi also understood this. Eyepatch Kurumi let out an “ahaha” laugh that made Kurumi feel even more annoyed.

“.....Well, from one matter to another. Regardless it’s a fact that you were acting independently of my instructions. Disobedience will bring ruin to the established group order. ——Your sin will be redeemed with your death.”

As Kurumi said that, eyepatch Kurumi didn’t seem that surprised. She merely replied back by saying “yes, yes” and slightly nodded her head.

Judging from her reaction, Kurumi presumed she had expected as much. From what she had heard from the other clone observing her, it seemed that eyepatch Kurumi had resolved to take action despite knowing the punishment beforehand.

“Looks like there no way around that. ——Ah, but there’s one more thing I have to do before dying. It’s a message from Shidou-san.”

“.....”

As Kurumi silently urged on, eyepatch Kurumi let out a faint but bold smile.

“——I love you, I love you. Let's get married my honey.”

“There was nothing else apart from my honey.”

As Kurumi cried out, her eyepatch counterpart's laughter intensified even more.

“Ufufu, so you've already heard from another clone already.”

“.....”

“Damm it”, Kurumi face quickly flushed with a red hue. But, it was already too late. Eyepatch Kurumi seemed to have seen through everything already as her laughter filled the scene.

“Then my job is already over. ——Now shall we send me off.”

Having said that, eyepatch Kurumi peacefully closed her eyes. The satisfied look on her face made Kurumi feel even more annoyed and insulted.

“Humph——”

Kurumi narrowed her gaze and pulled the trigger without any hesitation.

——The shadow of the bullet swept past eyepatch Kurumi's cheek.

“.....Ara, ara?”

Noticing that the bullet had perhaps intentionally missed, eyepatch Kurumi blinked in amazement while staring at Kurumi.

Burdened by an unpleasant expression, Kurumi let out a frustrated sigh.

“I’m not foolish enough to deliberately cut down on combat power at an important time like this. —Anyway, if you are so intent on dying, then please make yourself useful as *me* and die on the battlefield.”

After Kurumi said that, she swiftly departed from that location.

“.....Yes, yes. I understand——*me*.”

While following from behind, eyepatch Kurumi spoke with words brimming with determination.

Chapter 3: The Final Rest

“

The girl remained speechless while keeping her attention turning the pages of the book in her hand.

Then, in the blink of an eye, she instantaneously memorized the characters written on the text and turned to the next page a few seconds later.

The book currently in her possession was a scholarly tome, which roughly summarized the history that lead to formation of the present world.

It seems that the commodity was originally complied together for studious purposes. Since the style of the writings were recorded in an approachable format, it was very easy to understand. However, due to its habit of abridging the characters with simpler phrases, it may take longer to explore the hidden meanings behind the text.

However, that was a mere subtlety brought about by a so-called human nature. The girl narrowed her gaze while sensing the vibrations pulsating within her eardrum.

Right now, there were several electronic devices such as television sets, radio and cassette recorders lined up around the girl, each conveying its own voice. Reports. Drama. Live commentary. Rakugo. Music. Sounds of various forms overlapped into the girl's brain.

“.....Fuu.”

How many times has this been repeated? The girl snapped the book closed and let out a gentle sigh.

“.....So that's it. I can roughly grasp the language system.”

The girl spoke while turning the power off the TV and radio, which was dispersing background noise throughout the vicinity.

“

Afterwards, his little sister who sitting adjacent from the girl——whom was surely called Mana——gave a stunned look to the girl.

“.....? What happened?”

“No, even if you ask what happened.”

“Of course, until yesterday that child could only say “ah.....” “guu.....”, but now it’s amazing that she can speak so fluently.”

As Mana lashed out, the boy felt a faint drop of sweat fall down his back as he narrowed his brow.

“If there is sufficient information on characters and vocal sounds, it is possible to infer the language system from these common elements. Of course, due to many speculative components, I cannot deny that there will probably also include differences in detail.”

“No, from what you’re saying, it sounds perfectly fluent.”

“Um, why does it sound more authentic Japanese than Mana’s?”

“Since Nii-sama could only say “ah.....” or “gu.....” for a while, it is at least at higher level than Nii-sama.”

Mana exposed a kind smile while moving to pick up her bamboo sword bag, the boy hurriedly moved to stop her.

“Wait, calm down. I like your speech personally as well.”

“It’s good that you seem to understand.”

As Mana let out a sigh while crossing her arms together, the boy gently brushed his hand against his chest to provide some comfort.

“——That’s right, we can ask now that you can speak.”

“.....? What?”

“Who are you? Your power is obviously not normal. According to what Nii-sama said, you were found at the site of that explosion. That wouldn’t have been caused by your deed, right?”

Mana questioned while sharpening her gaze.

Nevertheless, that was not spoken without reason. There had been extensive news coverage about the catastrophic attacks that ravaged the Kanto region yesterday. It was impossible to not take heed of that when there was a person in front of you that was found at that scene.

However, after hesitating for a moment, the girl shook her head.

“.....Sorry. I don’t know.”

She had replied back honestly.

In fact, she did not know anything about herself. Both who she was and why she was there.

“Hmm.....I don’t think she is lying.”

“Then can you talk about what you understand? That, what, your circumstances—I want to understand.”

The boy gently asked. While shooting a sideward glance at the boy, Mana could only helplessly shrug her shoulders.

“Things to understand.....”

The girl lowered her eyes as she searched deep within her memory. While using the language she just learned, a fragmented scene began to resurface in her mind.

“I remember.....on the surface of ground level.....three people. Two young men and one girl. Although I didn’t know what they were talking about at that moment—but I think now it was probably that language called English.”

“Three people.....?”

“On the surface at ground level.....if it is related to that explosion, could it perhaps that large calamity that struck the skies of Eurasia? No, if that was the case, there shouldn't be any people.....”

“I don't know. Collecting, producing.....creating? I feel like it was something like that. And then.....——”

The girl placed her hand against her forehead as if suffering from a painful headache. Seeing this, the boy gave an anxious look of concern.

“A-are you alright? Don't push yourself.”

“I'm okay. It felt just a little painful.”

After the girl said that, the boy let out a sigh of relief.

Overlooking this scene, Mana could only scratch her head in a perplexed manner.

“Well.....it can't be helped if you can't remember right now. In that regard, try thinking more slowly.”

After trying to raise her bangs upward, Mana casted an even sharper gaze onto the girl.

“——Now then, since there is now already no issue communicating anymore, I would like to inform you of my frank impression about yourself.”

“Impression.....?”

“Yes, to be honest, you are too suspicious. I think it is best to contact the police immediately to protect you.”

“Mana.....”

The boy turned around and stared at Mana with a troubled expression.

However, Mana continued to speak after exhaling in another sigh.

“.....That being said, I actually don't want to do this. Creating clothes from thin air, mastering an unknown language immediately; anyway, no ordinary person could ever do that. If we let you go, there is the possibility of you being treated the same as mice from a research institute. Thinking about that gives me the creeps.”

Mana continued speaking while shrugging her shoulders.

“For the time being, would it be okay for us to look after you? Either fortunately or unfortunately, mother and father are not home right now, so there is a spare room available.”

As Mana crossed her arms against each other, the boy's expression soon brightened up.

“.....”

It took a moment for the girl to comprehend the information that she had heard.

To be precise, although the meaning behind the words was understood immediately, there still needed to be some time in order to comprehend the intentions of the speaker.

It seemed that they were intending to take care of her at this place.

“Why.....me?”

“Yes.....did you understand what I said? This is not just following the flow and promising okay, alright? In any case, in this situation it's not like you have a place to go anyway.”

“Although that is true.”

Then, Mana scratched her cheek again in a troubled manner.

“Then it should be all set. You.....umm.”

“Come to think of it, I still don’t know your name yet. Do you know your name?”

“Name.....”

Name. A given name. A symbol that distinguishes something. To be said, it was something that she did not have for herself.

While the girl remained silent, Mana shrugged as if wordlessly saying “it’s fine”.

“That’s not very easy to handle. We can’t keep using *you* forever. What about _____”

“—Mio.”

At that moment.

Just as Mana was in the middle of speaking, the boy spoke out in turn.

“Huh?”

“.....?”

As Mana and the girl stared intently at him, the boy, who did not expect such a reaction, awkwardly scratched his cheek.

“Ah, does it sound strange. I thought it was a good name.....”

“No, it’s not strange. Rather, I think it is an unexpected good name from Nii-sama, whose naming sense usually lacks common sense.”

“Well.....”

The boy felt a drop of sweat fall down after hearing Mana’s harsh critique. However, Mana continued on without concerning that.

“So where did that name come from? Is it the name of a heroine from a manga, or the name of imaginary lover that came blurting out from your thoughts?”

“No, no I wouldn’t do such a thing. But you see, didn’t we meet on the thirtieth? So it should be named after 30 (Mio).....that’s why.”

“.....U-uh——.....”

Mana furrowed her eyebrow in a conflicted expression. To be said, although it might have been a little bit too simple, it was difficult to deny that the name itself wasn’t bad.

“W-well, we have to ask the person herself. ——Hey, how is it?”

“Eh——?”

As the boy was speaking, the girl stared intently with wide open eyes.

At that moment, the boy finally had the feeling that he had decided upon a proper name for the girl.

“Well, concerning external matters, since you’ll be spending time here, it wouldn’t be much trouble at all to call you our relative. So then, the full name will be called *Takamiya Mio*.”

“Takamiya, Mio.....”

As the girl spoke out——her own name, her lip subconsciously began to tremble.

With only three characters.

And pronounced with six syllables.

It was only just a string of characters tied together.

But why? When those words leaked out from her throat, the girl felt warmth coming from her heart slowly spreading out.

And at the same time——she felt something slowly descending down her cheek.

“Wa!”

“Eh.....!?”

Both the boy and Mana let out a startled look.

“.....?”

As the girl tilted her head, she soon discovered the reason.

From the corner of her eyes, there were drips of liquid flooding down to the ground.

If properly expressed through the language she had just learned, this liquid would be called tears.

“Eh.....how strange. Why is it like, this.....”

The girl tried to use her hands to hold down her eyes in order to prevent more excess tears from flowing out, but the tears could still not be stopped.

“U, ah, ahh.”

Follow this, her body swayed forward after feeling a sensation of her heart being struck.

“Nii-sama.”

“.....Aaah.”

Then, while watching that scene unfold, the boy let out a faint smile as he sat down beside the girl and gently stroking her back.

With that comfortable feeling on her back, the girl——Takamiya Mio, cried during that brief time.



Two days had passed after the strategy meeting was conducted onboard <Fraxinus>.

Origami and Mana had arrived at a military base belonging to the Japanese Self Defense Force that was located on the outskirts of Tenguu City.

“Yeah——.....it’s been a long time since last coming here.”

While looking up at the elongated fence together, Mana spoke with a wistful expression. Origami nodded in response and slowly walked in while using her smartphone to confirm the time.

Origami and Mana used to belong to the Tenguu garrison, with the ranks of first class master sergeant and third lieutenant respectively.

Of course, speaking from an age perspective, two people who looked to be around junior high and high school status should not belong to the SDF. However, the situation was different if the condition of *Wizard* was factored in.

——The confidential anti-Spirit unit, also known as AST.

The combat unit was organized to overcome the existence said to be a disaster that was killing the world—— Spirits. All members of the unit were all individuals who had undergone surgery embed electronic components onto the brain in order to manually operate the Realizer Manifestation device—— Wizards to be more precise.

Although, no matter how strenuous the training, those who do not have the aptitude cannot handle the Realizer Manifestation device no matter how much high quality machinery is used.

Due to the lack of talented Wizards and the number of people willing to engage in harsh missions, the SDF had no choice but to accept the enlistment of young people like Origami into the Japanese self-defense force.

Well, to be accurate, Mana was not a member of AST, but rather a transfer from DEM industries.

Then, while walking along the fence, Mana let out an unexpected voice.

“But Origami-san.”

“I don’t mind you calling me sister-in-law.”

“.....Origami-san has already been discharged from the military and I fled from DEM in the same manner would have been viewed as betrayal. Can we really enter from the front entrance?”

When responding to Origami, Mana continued to speak to her while emphasizing with a formal designation. While slightly disappointing, Origami felt it was at least better than the previous *Tobiichi-san*.

“That shouldn’t be an issue. ——They should be coming soon at the agreed upon location.”

“Agreed upon?”

Mana tilted her head in bafflement after hearing Origami’s words. Then, as if on cue with Origami’s timing, a faint voice was heard from behind the fence.

“——Origami-san, Mana-san. Over here.”

“Huh?”

The sudden sound caused Mana to turn around. As if in synchronized rhythm, Origami also moved towards the direction of the voice.

Over there, two girls, whom were hiding behind a nearby bush, stuck out their faces against the fence.

One of them was a kitten-like girl with her hair tied in two braids at opposing ends. The other was a half Japanese girl who was characterized by her blond hair and glasses.

AST member, 2nd class private Mikie Okamine and AST mechanic Mildred F. Fujimura, both of them were colleagues of Origami. This type of entrance was supposed to be locked on both sides.

“Okamine-san and Fujimura-san? Why are the two of you here.....?”

After Mana finished asking, Mikie made a slight nod before gently pointing to the nearby side entrance. ——

“Millie-san has already opened the lock, so please come in before you can be seen.”

“Fufu, dealing with this cylindrical lock while equipped with a Cr-Unit is as easier as breaking a baby’s arm——”

“.....There must be a heavy sense of guilt at that level of difficulty.”

Mana stared with half-open eyes at Millie who seemed rather prideful.

However, after this situation, Mana finally understood the meaning behind what Origami had said beforehand.

“Indeed.....in this manner we can smoothly go both in and out.”

“It’s just like that.”

After giving back a short reply, Origami quickly surveyed the surroundings to confirm there were no onlookers and opened the door to the minimum extent necessary for sliding her body through. Whistling at those nimble movements, Mana imitated Origami’s actions.

However, there still wasn’t any time left spent being negligent. While observing the situation inside the base, they quickly hide in the shadows before finally arriving at the AST barracks.

Here, there was little concern over being spotted by ordinary members of the JSDF. Origami and the others finally loosened out a faint sigh of relief.

“Long time no see, Origami-san. Certainty, it’s been since that manga colosseum at the end of the last year.”

“It’s been a while. You were at great help at that time.”

“

After Origami gave a brief reply, a glimmer of sweat fell down Mikie's cheek as she made a conflicted expression.

“What?”

“No.....though sure enough, it feels that Origami-san has changed.....”

After saying that, Mikie let out a bitter smile.

Well, that ought to be so. The world had been *redone* by Shidou. It is not unreasonable that the Origami in Mikie's memory and the current Origami had integrated, with both of them creating together a distinctively new impression.

“After all.....that, you've changed after getting a boyfriend.”

“Yes. Both my body and heart have been dyed by him.”

As Origami gave an immediate reply, Mikie unknowingly let out a startled expression.

Incidentally, at that moment, Mana, who was right beside her, was staring at Origami with an unhappy glint in her eyes. Although the meaning behind it was not clear to Origami..... she thought perhaps it was throwing a tantrum in front of her sister-in law?

“More importantly.”

“R-right.....over here.”

Upon Origami urging, Mikie shook her head to rekindle her composure before going on to lead both Origami and Mana.

Following Mikie while walking through the nostalgic barracks, they eventually approached a door. Mikie cleared her throat with a slight cough before knocking against the door.

“Captain, its Okamine.”

“Come in.”

There was an immediate voice responding back to Mikie’s words. Mikie shoot a small glance at Origami as she gently opened the door.

“——Long time no see, Origami. I didn’t except to meet you here.”

Just as Origami and Mana entered the room, they were greeted by the voice of a woman sitting in front of a chair.

While appearing to be in her late 20s, the resilient muscles around her arms and neck were conspicuous noticeable even in her JDGSF work clothes. —— First Lieutenant Ryouko Kusakabe. The field captain of AST and former supervisor of both Origami and Mana.

Ryouko wasn’t the only one in the room. There were several familiar faces in the back, left, and right corners of the room. They were all former colleagues of Origami, fellow AST’s Wizards whom accompanied each other onto the battlefield together.

Nonetheless, neither Origami nor Mana was too surprised at this. After all, it would be impossible for Origami to converse without gathering up everyone together first.

“Now then, what is your purpose for coming here? And to bring a wanted person along as well.”

“Eh? Wanted?”

As she heard what said, Mana stared out blankly. Ryouko titled her head slightly as if saying, “you didn’t know?”

“Although it wasn’t disclosed to the public, DEM has issued out a notice saying that former Adeptus number Mana Takamiya escaped during battle and is interfering with DEM’s activates. People who catch her will be rewarded with 1 million dollars.”

“Hiyaa, so they finally placed a spiteful bounty on Mana? ——So, are you all going to catch me?”

After Mana said that, Ryouko replied back with a snort from her nose.

“Unfortunately, I want to minimize the damage to both equipment and men for work as much as possible.”

“Ahaha, I don’t dislike that side of you, captain.”

As Mana laughed, Ryouko let out a sigh before turning her attention back to Origami.

“We also don’t have much time to idle around, so let’s get straight to the topic. Although there is a past comradery between us, please don’t say that you’ve come here to discuss something unpleasant?”

“My apologizes, but please listen what I have to say.”

As Origami said that, all of the AST members, including Ryouko, let out a sigh in unison.

“.....Well, whatever. So what’s the matter?”

As Ryouko gave a shrug as if resigning on the matter, Origami made a small nod before continuing,

“Has AST received a request from DEM to mobilize?”

“Ha? What did you suddenly say? From DEM.....?”

Ryouko spoke out while turning to her subordinates. In turn, her subordinates all shook their heads as if having no recollection either.

It seemed that the order had not been sent out yet. Origami looked straight at Ryouko’s face while continuing.

“——On February 20th, a large scale battle will probably ensue around Tenguu city. At that time, there is the possibility that a request from DEM might be issued to AST. However, I hope everyone will ignore it.”

That's right.

That was the reason why Origami and Mana were using their valuable time before the decisive battle to visit this place.

DEM intended to mobilize all of the Wizard's combat power, the <Bandersnatch>, and the <Nibelcol> in order to take Shidou's life. In that case, it was easy to guess that they might also request cooperation from AST as well. Of course, in a direct battle the Spirits would not lose to them. However, unlike DEM's automatic dolls, they are only people who are fighting to defend their country and protect civilians. If they oppose each other, the Spirits might end up hesitating fighting them and DEM will certainly aim to treat them as shields. If possible, it would be best to eliminate this share of the worry ahead of time.

“.....Ha?”

Ryouko, if speaking more exactly, alongside all of the AST members sitting there, gazed at Origami with widened eyes.

“Battle? Who exactly is fighting whom?”

“DEM and <Ratatoskr>. And perhaps <Nightmare>, Tokisaki Kurumi will join as well.”

“W-wait. What are you talking——”

“Listen.”

After Origami interrupted Ryouko's words, she began to explain an outline of the current situation.

DEM's purpose. The existence called Spirits. And even the organization of <Ratatoskr> related to that matter.

Of course, they had already received permission from Kotori to disclose the existence of <Ratatoskr>. Even though they would still have to choose whether or not to accept this new information, Origami continued to explain without any lies.

Since no matter how much more reasonable it would make the story, falsehood breeds feelings of mistrust and would obscure the true value of the truth.

Even if it was only one out of hundred things being told was false, it would cause the other party to begin to doubt everything else as well. It may turn out that honesty could be a fatal mistake, but as of now, it was their best hope in trying to convince the other side.

“In simple terms, that’s about it.”

“.....”

After Origami finished explaining, Ryouko, Mikie and the others all responded back with different reactions.

There were those whose eyes jumped open in astonishment, others who placed their hands against their foreheads in a contemplative gesture. There were people frowning with unease.....although the reactions were various, they all shared a shared confusion over hearing what Origami had just said. But that was to be expected. If Origami had also heard such a thing while still in AST, she would likely have the same reaction.

“.....What the hell is this?”

Despite not knowing how long it took, Ryouko finally opened her mouth with a heavy tone.

“A secret organization protecting Spirits? That’s already beyond absurd. Anyway, you expect me to believe that and withstand DEM’s help request?”

“Ah, captain, so you do believe that there will be a help request from DEM.”

“.....Don’t twist my words.”

As Ryouko angrily glared at Mana, Mana responded back by shrugging her shoulders and gave off a demeanor that suggested her ambivalence at *being disrespectful*.

“Although you probably already understand it, dismissing DEM’s request is synonymous with ignoring instructions from above. For us, why would we willingly court martial ourselves and forfeit our jobs?”

“It doesn’t matter if you all resign beforehand. Like I said, <Ratatoskr will handle re-employment.”

“You.....”

Ryouko let out another heavy sigh while scratching her messy hair.

“Obeying orders aside.....what do you mean to not attack the Spirits. Aren’t they the natural enemy of humanity that’s been causing spacequakes? We have always been order to protect everyone from those walking disasters.....”

“The information that Spirits are organisms that only intend to destroy should be regarded as part of DEM’s propaganda. From the very beginning, we’ve been dancing at the palm of DEM’s hands.

“.....”

Ryouko remained silent while staring at Origami, as if trying to discern the intentions from its very depths.

Then, as if not being able to handle such a silence, Mikie let out a trembling voice while alternating between looking at Origami and Ryouko.

“I-I don’t think Origami-san is lying.....”

“Ahaha——Although I can’t enter the battlefield at all, was that organization called <Ratatoskr>? Right? So how do the units look over there——If so, and then let me work there. Millie-san is very talented. Can help——.”

“.....Sorry, but please be quiet for a second.”

Ryouko replied back to Mikie in a low voice for speaking out of turn. As Mikie's shoulders began shaking, Millie let out an unexpected laugh.

Then, after returning to silence for a while, Ryouko eventually let out a long sigh.

".....I can't do that."

"Captain.....!"

Mikie took a step forward to Ryouko as if trying to make an appeal. However, Origami reached out her hand in order to stop her.

"O-Origami-san....."

"That's unfortunate, but I can't blame the captain's choice."

Origami closed her eyelids for a moment to concentrate before opening them up again.

She did not feel that they would have simply believed in her words. ——No, to be more precise, even with their trust, they would not be obliged to act in accordance to her instructions.

Origami turned over to Mana, who let out a disappointed sigh while following behind her.

"....."

Then, Origami unexpectedly stopped on her foot while leaving the room.
"If you obey the request to enter the battlefield, try to hide behind the <Bandersnatch> as a shield."

"Huh.....?"

"If possible, I don't want to kill you."

After Origami finished, Ryouko let out an angry huff while an audible clicking sound was heard from her standing up from the chair.

“.....What. Aren't you completely overlooking us? Certainty you are skilled Wizard, but if we were all fighting together——”

At that moment, with a slight cry from her throat, Ryouko's voice came to a complete stop.

However, that was a matter of course. If an inorganic feather with light radiating from its tip appeared suddenly in the air, everyone would have made the same reaction. The ray of light swept past Ryouko's cheek and exploded against the wall in a fury of smoke.



“Please.”

“

While listening to all of the team members breathlessly gasping in shock behind them, Origami and Mana left the room.



“.....Um?”

At the Spirit mansion besides the Itsuka residence, Natsumi, who was walking in the hallway, abruptly stopped after a small sound was caught by her eardrum.

“? What’s wrong, Natsumi-san.”

“Is your shoelace untied? How ominous!”

As Yoshino walked towards her while slightly tilting her head, the rabbit puppet “Yoshinon” on her left hand was using the forepaw to cover its face. However, Natsumi shook her head after casting a glance at her own shoe just in case.

“That’s not it.....did you hear some noise just now?”

“Noise.....?”

“Yeah, from that direction.....”

After saying that, Natsumi shyly tiptoed forward.

No, there shouldn’t be any chance of a burglary in a residence that boasted a security to an excessive degree now.....however, perhaps due to her innate disposition, the thought still remained in Natsumi’s mind as she walked towards the source of the sound.

“That is.....”

“Is that the kitchen? Maybe someone is cooking?”

While follow being Natsumi, “Yoshinon” spoke out in turn while nodding her head.

Just as “Yoshinon” had said, there is a large kitchen at the ground level of the mansion. According to Kotori, it was supposed to be a facility for the Spirits to cook together. Just before Valentine’s Day, it was the memorable site of where everyone was making chocolate together.

“Who is there?”

“Who knows.....”

Although Natsumi was terribly frightened, she still mustered the strength to lower her head in order to peek inside

Following that.

“Hmm, tis difficult, does this suffice?”

“Umu. Well done Mukuro. That should be pretty good!”

“.....Mun, Tohka, thou portions seem quite large.”

“Mu? That’s right? Shouldn’t it be the size of my palm?”

“...If Muku’s memory is certain, the palm size refers to a measurement that fits at the palm of one’s hand. I think it not refer to a hand with a palm that is stretched out fully.”

From behind, they were peeking at a conversation between the two of them.

“Tohka and.....Mukuro?”

As Natsumi spoke out in a stunned manner, Tohka and Mukuro turned around to the source of the voice that they heard.

“Oh, isn’t it Natsumi, Yoshino, and Yoshino!”

“Mu, what’s the matter, why are you in this place.”

“No, it’s because we heard something happening.....it’s better to ask what you’re doing.....”

Natsumi spoke out while raising her brow a few times in curiosity.

As Tohka and Mukuro both turned around, the objects held within their hands were also reflected onto Natsumi’s eyes. Steamed rice crafted by hand into a triangular shape. That’s right, they were rice balls.

“Eh, what, didn’t we just eat a while ago? Are you still hungry? Leaving Tohka aside, to think Mukuro as well.....”



After saying that, Natsumi felt her gaze unconsciously towards the chest of both of them. Tohka was needless to say, but even Mukuro boasted a proud chest compared to her slender body.Sure enough, were there impressive people who can convert all of that nutrition for *that part*?

While Natsumi was immersed in such thoughts, Tohka and Mukuro's chests suddenly swayed. No, the swaying of the chest was a natural by-product from two people moving their heads sideways.

"It's not the same thing.No, although I also want to eat, but that's not all."
".....What do you mean?"

"Mun. Presently, Nushi-sama and sister-in law are preparing for the upcoming war. A conscious mind would naturally incur an empty stomach."

Hearing what the two of them had said, Yoshino struck her head with a hand with a comical "pon" sound. To be precise, it was with the same hand holding "Yoshinon" though.

"Ah.....could this be providing refreshments?"

"Umu!"

"Indeed."

After finishing speaking, Tohka and Mukuro raised the rice balls in their hands. Natsumi nodded her head as if saying ".....I see, I see"

".....Well, that does this sound good. Shidou and the others will certainly be happy."

"Oh, Natsumi you also think so as well?"

"Eh, aahh, well."

Natsumi diverted her eyes as Tohka made a delightful smile.Incidentally, Natsumi did not look away because of the inclusions of any lies or of the sort in her words. It was simply because Tohka's glimmering eyes were simply too

dazzling. It was to the extent that Natsumi began to wonder if she had a vampire for an ancestor somewhere down the line.

At that moment, Tohka looked as if she had come up with something before calling out to Natsumi and Yoshino.

“Yes, if you’re free right now, Natsumi how about you make some as well? It’s fun!”

“Eh.....? N-no, I’ll.....”

Natsumi drew out a shaky voice in response to Tohka’s sudden proposal. However, right beside her, Yoshino and Yoshinon had glimmering eyes fill with anticipation that spoke out like they were saying “we’re waiting for you to say that.....!”

“Can we.....? Then, please let us join. We also want to help in everyone’s efforts.....!”

“Nifufu, Yoshinon’s paws already have an intolerable thirst!Eh? You’re saying that rabbits don’t have foot pads? Ufufu, brats that are too quick witted won’t be well received.

Looking at the two of them becoming completely enthusiastic, Natsumi could not help shed a few drops of cold sweat.

“I, forgot about what I have to say.....after all——”

“Natsumi-san.....let’s do this. If we do this together, I’m sure it will be fun.”

“Eh, no, t-that.”

Hearing what Yoshino just said, Natsumi speech fell to an incoherent level. Slimy sweat gushed from her entire body as her heart rate plumed straight up.

This reaction didn’t mean a lack of skills in cooking rice balls, nor an allergy to rice in general. Of course, the reason did not stem from an unwillingness to show appreciation to Shidou, Kotori, and the others.

It was a simpler and easier reason. If imagined simply, rice ball, as their names would suggest, are dishes made by kneading cooked rice with one's hands.

——That's right, a chef, with both hands, directly.

Even ordinary handmade dishes would make people hesitate. If replaced by food that has been directly touched by Natsumi's hands, then no one would want to eat that.....!

Natsumi's rice balls, give them to fully loaded bombers to scatter against an enemy nation, or to captives that have not eaten for a few days. "If you don't want to starve, then eat this, but hey it's a rice ball that Natsumi has grasped, hahahahahaha!" It would only serve the purpose of giving that sort of feeling of hopelessness. Presumably, the captives would insist on not eating due to their own dignity as human beings. However, in the end, unable to resisting the pain from fasting, they would endure against the rice balls with hellish anguish until their dying breath.Despite this being a little too severe, there was also the sense it could be effectively seen within in her expectations.

However, no matter how wrong those absurd thoughts were, it was absolutely something she could not give to her fellow comrades. Natsumi let out a bitter sigh while trying to shake those thoughts out of her head.

"No, no.....giving everyone rice balls that I personally touch would be already considered a poisoning incident. It would be breaking the law."

After saying that, Natsumi took a step back.

"That kind of thing....."

Then, after Yoshino muttered that out, she looked onto Natsumi with gaze filled with resolve.

"Natsumi-san, please show me your hand."

"Huh.....? L-like this?"

Although not knowing what Yoshino was intending, Natsumi still did as she was told and extended out her hand.

Then, Yoshino nervously focused her gaze onto Natsumi's fingers.

"Argh."

Following that sound, Yoshino gently bit against Natsumi's fingers.

"Uhiya!? Y-Yoshino?"

The unexpected affair caused Natsumi to reflexively cry out. Then, Yoshino, who was perched on Yoshino's left hand, began clattering in order to speak.

"Eh——Since Yoshino is busy right now. Yoshino will speak on her behalf. Natsumi-san's hands are not poison. Yoshino wants to say this! How cool! How lovely!"

"Hi-Hieee....."

For a second time, there was fear and trepidation. Sinful and sacred admiration, various emotions were blended against each other in her mind. Natsumi's face seeped out various bodily fluids as her expression completely shut down.

However, it was not over yet. Watching this scene unfold, Tohka gasped out an "Oh!" sound while striking her fist against the palm of her hand. Then, while mimicking Yoshino, she chewed on Natsumi's fingers on her left hand.

"Gya ——!?"

With both hands held down, Natsumi had her eyes turn into blank dots.

"Hmm?"

Having taken notice to these actions from afar, Mukuro took a great leap forward.

However, since both hands were being occupied by Yoshino and Tohka, Mukuro seemed to hesitate for a brief moment——

“Mun.”

Having seemingly thought of an idea, Mukuro pressed both of her hands against Natsumi’s face, slowly drawing closer and closer to her mouth.

“.....!? I-I get it! I get it! I’ll also do it together with everyone, so please stop.....!”

As Natsumi made her desperate appeal, everyone’s facial expression brightened as they went back to their original positions.

“Umu, then let’s get started!”

“Mun, it is good to wash our hands over there first.”

“T-that.....I’m sorry Natsumi-san, but I just wanted to work together with Natsumi-san no matter what.....”

“.....Ah, that, um. Thank you.”

Yoshino lightened her facial expression with a cheerful smile as Natsumi replied back with reddish cheeks.

.....Well, it seemed to be unavoidable. While thinking of the poor victim who would have to eat her rice ball, Natsumi drew a cross over her chest and prayed for that person’s peace.

Then, after they washed their hands, they gave a deluxe cooking cover to <Yoshino> before returning back to Tohka and the others.

“Well then.....let’s get started. Tohka, how many have you guys already done?”

“Me and Mukuro have only made one each! After all, we’ve just started!”

“Mun.”

After saying that, the two of them proudly presented the rice balls in front of their hands to Natsumi. While Mukuro's could be passed as part of the norm, Tohka's rice ball was overstepping the usual size proportions.

"How about it? Isn't it well-made?"

"Eh, well.....the shape is alright. But Tohka, don't you think the size is a little too big?"

"Mu, is that right. Then this one will be for personal use, I'll make another one to give to Shidou."

As she said so, Tohka laid down the oversized rice ball onto a plate and began to drill a hole in the center with her fingertips.

"Tohka-san?"

"What are you doing?"

"Umu, grasping the filling inside. Actually, I want to add some of the ingredients inside into Shidou's meal. But this is really difficult. Since it can't be helped, I've decided to put the contents in after the shape is made."

"Ah, so that's it."

Natsumi nodded after recognizing it as well. If the fillings were simply stuffed into the rice, it would surely be harder to fix the shape by pinching the rice afterwards.

At first glance, one can find various arrangements lying on the kitchen table. Finely chopped soy sauce mixed bonito flakes, tsukudani made from Kombu, a large chunks of cod roe, as well as tuna mayo prepared in large quantities for some inexplicit reason. On the more unusual side, there was pre-fried chicken and sliced pork that stewed just to the right extent, and so on. It was a collection of all-star rice ball ingredients.

"Fufu, fuufuu——."

Tohka was humming cheerfully while sorting out the ingredients.

But, along the way, her shoulder gave a small shiver as her humming song stopped abruptly.

“.....Alright.”

Then, as Tohka gave a slight nod to display her affirmation in her decision, she grabbed a plate with her hand. When looking at the contents of the plate, both Natsumi and Yoshino stared in wide-eyed astonishment.

“Wait, are those umeboshi?”

“Tohka-san, weren’t you not good with those.....?”

After hearing what the two of them had said, Tohka nodded her head as if saying “I know” with determined look.

“Umu.....it really was sour, so I was weak to it. However, that is why I have to overcome it. If I can’t conquer umeboshi, how can I hope to beat DEM!?”

After saying that, Tohka clenched her fist. Looking on that power scene, Natsumi couldn’t help but applaud.

“I-I see.....un, although the theory isn’t quite understood, I can apprehend your readiness.”

“Tohka-san, how amazing.....!”

“Hmmm.....how admirable, Tohka. If that is the case, Muku will also decide on preparations.”

After finishing, Mukuro slowly paced herself to the countertop beside the cooking station to pick up a plate.

“Wasabi-zuke. At this moment, thou and Muku will stop to spin and endless string of fate.”

“Eh, Mukuro, do you dislike Wasabi-zuke?”

“Munu. Pickles themselves are favorable as a whole, but this variety is too spicy, so I have long since avoided its consumption. ——However, Tohka’s boldness truly deserves to be admired. As she said, one cannot be afraid of such things when heading off to battle.”

As if infected by Tohka’s passion, Mukuro declared in a firm tone. Upon seeing this, Tohka gave her an affirmative thumbs up.

Not falling behind, Yoshino nodded her head before speaking.

“I-I also.....I’ll also do my best! In my words.....that, raw celery I am weak against.”

“Oh! Then come join us!”

“Celery. There seems to be some in the refrigerator.”

“.....No, no, if you add celery to rice balls, then even those who like celery would be in conflict.”

Cold sweat fell down Natsumi’s cheeks in response to what three of them all had said.

“That’s right! As expected of Natsumi!”While looking down, to be honest being boasted in that regard made her feel uncomfortable.”

“By the way Natsumi, do you also have something weak against?”

“Eh? Something weak against.....what would that be?”

As Natsumi was pondering that over, <Yoshino> began chattering her mouth open.

“Ah, if I remember correctly Natsumi-chan, didn’t you say that it’s difficult for you to look directly at other people?”

“Hmmm, how can that be added?”

"No, no, these two meanings are not the same...! And let's not talk about this; the idea itself is very weird!"

"That's right Mukuro. We can't just dig someone's eyes out. Let's use the eyes of the tuna as a substitute here. It's rich in DNA, so when eaten it would light up the brain."

"Mun. Tis not a bad idea."

"Hold on——ahhhhh!"

Seeing these two people hold a serious discussion about DHA without thinking, Natsumi couldn't help but let out a shout of frustration.

Whether it was expected or good, the preparations for refreshments seemed to be going through a rough passage.



".....Eh——Ancient east and west game. Even if isn't erotic, it sounds erotic. Chinsuko."

Note: The first syllable of the first word in Japanese sounds similar to the male sex organ (Chinko). Chinsuko itself is a Japanese pastry.

Nia's voice suddenly echoed in the living room inside the Itsuka residence. Immediately, to respond to that voice, another one subsequently followed afterwards.

"Eh——let me think for a moment. Ippai."

Note: The word full (いっぱい, ippai) is only one syllable off from oppai (おっぱい) or breasts.

"Answer. Saxophone."

Note: The pun here is saxophone (サククス) and sex (セックス).

Just like Nia and Miku, Yuzuru replied back with rhythmic precision.

Then everyone turned their eyes towards the next respondent, Kaguya.

“Eh.....!? U-uh.....that.....well, Machupicchu.....?”

Note: Machupicchu is one of seven districts of the Urubamba Province in Peru. The pun is that it sounds similar to chu (チュウ), sound effect for kissing.

“.....!”

As Kaguya replied with reddened cheeks, everyone who was lying on the sofa suddenly stood up.

“Eh, can you explain in detail Kaguyan. Why is the word Machupicchu erotic? Nia is too pure to understand nyaa.”

“Please explain to me! Please don’t hesitate to teach me! Please ☆Kaguya-sensei!”

“Request. Seeking explanation. When did Kaguya feel sexually excited by the ruins of the Inca Empire?”

“Why are all of you ganging up on me!?”

Kaguya cried out in irritation, but the three of them did not relent. All of them stood up together to seek an explanation from Kaguya.

“U-Uhh.....”

Not being able to stand against that abnormal pressure, Kaguya eventually gave up and continued to speak.

“.....T-that sound.....it does not look like, something like that.”

“Eh——? What kind of sound——?”

“I don’t understand——”

“Petition. Please elaborate further.”

However, the momentum of their three-pronged attack did not diminish in the slightest as they continued questioning with even more excitement.

Having been completely defeated, Kaguya replied back with a face bright red her voice resembled a mosquito flying around.

“.....W-when kissing.....”

“.....”

Immediately at the next moment, the three of them after a moment silence all let out a “Ha——!” sigh without exception.

“Well, I see, I see.”

“Yaaah! Kaguya-san is too cute!”

“Mercy. Well, it does seem to be serious, so we’ll leave it be.”

“What a horrible feeling to make me bother explaining! Then you guys also clarify. Hey Nia, how is Chinsuko erotic?”

“Eh? Of course it refers to pen——”

“It’s fine if you don’t explain it!?”

Faced against Nia’s unambiguous interpretation, Kaguya let out a scream to interrupt her.

“Ehh——but you told me to explain——”

After saying that, Nia shrugged her shoulders before returning back to her original position with everyone else before speaking aloud once again.

“Well, let’s continue then. Chinchilla.”

Note: Chinchilla (チンチラ) sounds similar to panchira (パンチラ), which pretty much means panty shot.

“Err, shippai.”

Note: The word shippai (しっばい) can mean a social faux pas, but Miku is trying to make another pun on oppai again.

“Answer. Six.”

Note: Same as before with saxophone. Six (シックス), pronounced as shikkusu, sounds the same as sex (セックス).

In the blink of an eye, the order had once again returned to Kaguya. With the red glow still flushing her cheeks, she whispered out in a trembling voice.”

“.....Chu-Chupa Chups.”

Note: Same lollipops Kotori likes. Again, Kaguya is choosing a word that contains the syllable for the Japanese sound effect of kissing.

“.....!”

After Kaguya said that, the three of them rustled together in unison once again.

“Hey, hey, Kaguyan, why is that erotic?”

“Please tell me——!”

“Puzzled. Has Kaguya always been looking at Kotori in an erotic manner?”

“Waah, that’s really enough you guys ahhh!”

Having been once again bothered by those three, Kaguya let out a frustrated cry.

“What is going on in the first place? Even though I participated in order to cooperate with everyone, why did you guys wanted to play this ancient east and west game anyway!?”

Note: Also known as the Yamanote line game, Players go around in a circle (like the titular train line) and name any stations they can think of that are on the Yamanote sen. Even though it's called the Yamanote Line game, you can play the game with any category, not just station names.

"Eh——because it's not busy right now."

Nia replied back to the question while swaying her leg to the other side. Even though Miku and Yuzuru did not specifically clarify, they also shrugged to show consent to Nia's words.

"Ku....."

Kaguya clenched her teeth grudgingly.

However, it was difficult to deny. After all, Kaguya also maintained a similar impression.

Even though there were four Spirits at the Itsuka residence right now, they were all sitting on the sofa doing nothing special.

Looking at this scene, it would be very daring to believe that an all-out war will be waged in a few more days. How stable——no, rather what a time to be lazy.

Actually, they were originally preparing for battle, but the main assignments were already taken care of by <Ratatoskr>. More than anything else, they were not told the details of the plan due to being worried that it would be leaked due to <Beelzebub>, which explains their current predicament of being at a loss of what to do. Actually, Kotori's instructions amidst the ambiguity were to rest their bodies so that they would be mentally prepared for no matter what strategy was announced on the day of the decisive battle.

Yet in this manner, when all is said and done, with the decisive battle imminent, nobody was interested reading or playing video games. Indeed, this resulted in the creation of a strange space of paradoxically wanting to do something, yet also not knowing what should be done.

"I thought there would be something to do if I got here, but....."

“Consent. Truly unexpected. If Shidou is not at home, then he must be onboard <Fraxinus>.”

“I would suppose so? After all Imouto-chan isn’t here as well. Also, didn’t Oririn and Manati went to the JGSDF base? At that time, I should have tagged along with them to collect data——”

“

“

“

Just as everyone was thinking over various hypothetical scenarios that didn’t take place, silence once again filled the room.

Immediately afterwards, perhaps feeling that the atmosphere was getting awkward, Nia raised her voice.

“.....Eh——ancient east and west game, boy’s handsome moments.”

“Huh?”

Hearing the unexpected theme, Kaguya narrowed her eyes in surprise.

“For me to say——uh——, sure enough, it was the kiss he gave to me and not willing to give up while I was dying. That sort of tight feeling pulled on the heartstrings.”

After saying, Nia took the nearby cushion and pressed against her face while making a sound in between a chirp and groan. Kaguya couldn’t help but reflexively blush at the sight.

“Let’s see, for me it was in the DEM Japanese branch when he stepped forward to protect me from Inverse Tohka’s attack.....! At that time, he said, “I.....promised”! Yaah! Just remembering makes me recall how cool he was!”

Next, Miku spoke out while fidgeting her legs in excitement.

Following, this Yuzuru replied back with one finger against her chin.

“Thinking. For Yuzuru it was when he stopped the fight between Kaguya and Yuzuru with a single swing from <Sandalphon>.”

“Ah.....n-no fair! That’s what I wanted to say!”

“Denial. That’s just the order. It’s beyond reproach.”

“I don’t remember, when we did we decided to answer in order in the first place!?”

“Careless. These sorts of matters always come at a first-come first serve basis. Alright, now it is Kaguya’s turn. Or does that mean Kaguya can only think of only one handsome scene with Shidou?”

“Ku.....”

Although she was less than impressed by Yuzuru’s words, it was impossible to remain silent when told something like that. Kaguya stuttered out while her face was still flushed with a red hue.

“.....For me, it was when Shidou took the two of us out for bowling.....I was crying when he stroke my head silently.....”

“Kyupin! Maiden sense detected!”

“Please give the details of this story!”

“Prying. When was this story? Even Yuzuru does not know about this.”

“How did we end up in this development again? That’s the reason I was unwilling before!”

Hearing Kaguya cry out with tears in her eyes, the three of them let out a laugh before returning back to the couch.

Then, after a moment of silence, Nia suddenly let out her voice.

“.....I really don’t want boy to die.”

Then, as if responding to that, the other Spirits joined in a quiet, yet powerful tone.

“Yes, of course. If there was no darling, perhaps I still wouldn’t have been able to trust others.”

“Affirmation. If it wasn’t for Shidou, Yuzuru and Kaguya would still be fighting to determine who would be the one left remaining in this world.”

“That’s right. Me as well, if it wasn’t for boy, I would already be dead. Ahahaha.”

Although the context of what was said was no laughing manner, Nia still spoke out in a cheerful tone. Looking at that, Kaguya couldn’t help but make a wry smile.

“.....Well, that’s right. Me too, I feel like I haven’t fully repaid him yet.”

After she finished speaking, Kaguya lightly got up from the sofa. Then, while placing her hand in front of her face to make a stylish pose.

“Not only that, I will turn into a guardian of darkness to protect others. People who dare touch the fangs of purgatory, notice that the death god’s invitation is waiting in front of you!”

Having made such a grandiose declaration, Nia and the others let out an “Oh——” sound while giving sparsely round of applause.

“You’re as cool as ever.So, what does that mean?”

“Translation. I can’t bear to live if someone as beloved as Shidou dies! Kaguya will do her best to protect Shidou. However, as a reward, she wants a kiss from Shidou. That is what Kaguya meant just now.”

“Kya——! How bold!”

“That translation is full of malice!”

Just as Kaguya raised her voice to protest, a brisk ringing noise was heard coming from the smart phone.

Moreover, it wasn't just one. All of the Spirits' phones began going off at the same time.

"Un.....What, ah, Tohka?"

After taking a quick glance at the screen to confirm the name of the caller, Kaguya clicked on the call icon. Then, a lively voice was heard coming from the over end.

"Kaguya! I'm preparing rice balls right now for Shidou and the others at the apartment. How about coming over to join us!?"

At the same time, Kaguya vaguely heard that the other calls all contained a similar topic.

"A-ah.....it's Yoshino. Kaguya-san, we are providing refreshments for Shidou-san, if it's convenient——"

"Nia. It's Muku. Beseaching you to lend a hand."

"Ahhh! Natsumi-san, why did you send a text message instead of calling! Let me hearing your lovely voice! Ahhhhhhh!"

Apparently, despite Spirits in the apartment contacted Kaguya and the others at the same time, Miku was the only one to not be contacted via phone call, causing her stand up and sob spasmodically in sorrow.

As Kaguya made a faint smile seeing this, she quickly replied back to the voice on the phone.

"Kuku, excellent, my kin. I will respond to your summons. Wait just a while."

"Oh! I will be waiting!"

After waiting until Tohka was finished, Kaguya hanged up the phone.

It seemed that both Nia and Yuzuru had also ended their calls at the same time. When looking at each other, one can notice that everyone was smiling. Incidentally, the only one left out was Miku, who was replying back to her mail at a frightening speed.

“What exquisite timing.”

“Comment. To be truthful, even small things can be appreciated as use to Shidou and the others. Let’s go.”

“Hey, it sounds like it will be fun making rice balls with everyone!”

“Alright, to pass the time until we arrive at the apartment, this will be the last ancient west and east game. The theme is most erotic experienced so far.....”

“Like I said earlier, I’ll never play that game again!!”

Faced against what Nia had said in a deemphasized manner, Kaguya let out a fierce scream.



Onboard the bridge of the aerial warship <Fraxinus>, floating 15 thousand meters above Tenguu City, the crew members were busy fulfilling out their various tasks.

“——Shiizaki, are you asking for support from each branch?”

"Already issued, I will report immediately after receiving the reply."

“Very good. Kawagoe, what about the inspection of facilities on the ground?”

"There are no problems present. If you are interested, it can be used now."

“Alright. Maria, have you finished aircraft maintenance? If you have any requests, please say something.”

“There are no basic problems. But if I may be greedy, a Wizard should perform a manual inspection of the Realizer manifestation device. ——I’d also like to ask for washing and waxing the exterior.”

“The former is approved, but the latter is denied. Anyway, it will become huge mess regardless the day after tomorrow anyway.”

“Muu, as they say, a women’s mind will begin to wilt away without proper care, Kotori.”

“What did you say?”

Kotori struck the console with a “Bang!” noise while continuing to issue commands without any stagnation. Looking at this scene unfold on the bridge, Shidou couldn’t help but make a small wry smile.

“Well, trying calming down a bit. Why don’t you take a break for a while? Here.”

After saying that gently, Shidou handed a body over. In response, Kotori muttered out “.....that’s true” while scratching her head to suppress her anger.

“Thank you. Then there’s no need for me to be polite.”

Shortly after saying that, Kotori added a straw before chugging down the sports drink. Afterwards, she breathed out a sigh of relief.

Although she didn’t say it, it was clear from her appearance how exhausted she was. Looking at her usually energetic sister be reduced to such a weary state, Shidou gently clenched his fist.

“.....I’m sorry. I wish there was something I can do to help.”

Hearing what Shidou had just said, Kotori narrowed her eyes in surprise before shrugging her shoulders.

“What are you talking about? Your job is the hardest; I can’t overwork you now by letting you help other people’s work.”

“The hardest.....?”

“Yeah. —Whatever you do, survive.”

Kotori took another gulp of the sports drink while staring directly into Shidou’s eyes.

“The opponent is the largest Wizard organization, DEM Industries. It’s not clear what will happen at that time. You need to adjust your condition as much as possible. On that day, I don’t want to hear you apologizing from catching a cold, being nervous, or lacking sleep.”

“I see.....that’s right.”

Impressed both self-reflection and justification, Shidou slightly raised his hand as an indication of surrender to Kotori’s argument.

Although the phrase “rest is also a part of work” was familiar, Shidou had only known the phrase without understanding the depth of the meaning.

Although, this feeling was not just limited to Shidou, as the Japanese people always tend to feel a little guilty in situations where they are the only ones absent while everyone else is diligently working.

However, if one utilizes the time of rest to make wasteful movements that squanders physical energy or raise mental exhaustion from unnecessary worrying, it would on the contrary only add to the burden of one’s companions.

Furthermore, the upcoming battle in two more days could be said to be a clash that would determine the fate of all of the Spirits. Since the key factor was Shidou’s life, he couldn’t afford even the slightest moment’s worth of negligence then.

Besides—that wasn’t the only concern.

“.....Kurumi, I wonder if she’ll be coming as well.”

After hearing what Shidou had said, Kotori set down the bottle and turned her chair to face Shidou again.

“She’ll definitely come; we heard at least that much for Kurumi’s clone. Rather, from that wording, it would be an exaggeration to say that we’re caught in fight between Kurumi and Westcott. ——Well, since the goal is Shidou’s life, it’ll naturally develop into that.”

“.....That’s true.”

“.....”

Perhaps sensing a feeling of unease coming from Shidou, Kotori faintly knitted her brow up.

“I think you also understand, but this time you absolutely cannot attempt something inexplicable on your own again. Sealing the reiryoku of Spirits is our goal, but that is meaningless if you don’t survive. ——Your most important task now is to survive. With all things consider, you mustn’t go off wandering searching for Kurumi on the battlefield. What kind of person would try to chase after two rabbits down the rabbit hole at once?”

“I-I know.”

Shidou replied back with a degree of nervousness trapped in his voice. Although it hadn’t reached the level of a clear plan yet, he couldn’t deny that the idea was floating in his head.Was it that easy to understand from his mere expression alone?

“.....Take it easy, Shin.”

Just as Shidou and Kotori were conversing, a voice was suddenly heard coming from the left side. ——It was Reine.

“.....Kotori isn’t telling you to ignore Kurumi. Rather, it would be better to say that we’re planning on helping her to the best of our ability.”

“Eh?”

Seeing Shidou look at her in surprise, Kotori could only shrug her shoulders in response.

“Yeah well, even for Kurumi, it would be unfavorable to wage an all-out war against DEM. Of course, focusing on the idea of Shidou surviving first, it would be best to try and seal Kurumi after this war. Until then, it’s not a question of whether we should help or not.”

“Kotori.....”

Kotori muttered out an “after all”, while keeping her gaze at the ground.

“——Whatever the reason, it would be impossible for us devastate the person who saved Shidou from the fate of death numerous times, even I can’t do that.”

“.....Yeah, you’re right.”

While listening to Kotori’s words, Shidou nodded with both relief and determination.

Then, Maria’s voice began to echo from the bridge’s speakers.

“Well, since Kurumi’s goal is Shidou’s reiryoku, even if he survives that battle, he still has to work hard.”

“Haha.....definitely, that’s also true.”

Seeing that was indeed the case, Shidou smiled weakly.

During such an interaction between Shidou and Maria, Kotori suddenly made a difficult expression.

“.....? Kotori. What’s wrong?”

“Goal.....”

“Eh?”

As Shidou slightly slanted his head, Kotori replied back while holding one hand against her chin.

“It’s the goal. Basically, everyone is acting in accordance to their own objective. Our goal is to save the Spirits. DEM’s purpose is to invert the Sephira Spirit Crystal. Kurumi’s goal is to use Shidou’s reiryoku in order to travel back to the past. ——At least three different motives have been incorporated in this battle.”

“.....? A-ah, is there anything wrong with that?”

Kotori raised a finger one by one as she listed each goal. Shidou, not understanding the intention behind this, caressed the back of his neck.

So then, Kotori raised the fourth finger while staring directly at Shidou.

“——One is missing, isn’t it? What is <Phantom>’s goal.”

“Ah.....”

After hearing what Kotori said, Shidou opened his eyes wide in alarm. <Phantom>. The mysterious Spirit that had turned Kotori and the others into Spirits by handing the Sephira Spirit Crystals.

If there was no <Phantom> in the first place, the current situation would not be possible. Even so, that Spirit had not revealed her appearance either.

“Why would <Phantom> give us the Sephira Spirit Crystals? For what kind of purpose would she want to increase the number of disaster level Spirits in the world?”

“.....Just as we are about to fight the enemy, that one person, whether it’s her existence or purpose, has no trace. That’s really terrifying to think about.”

“That.....”

Hearing what Kotori had said, Shidou took in a deep gulp.

It seemed that Shidou wasn’t the only one listening on. The crew members performing tasks on the lower level of the bridge also displayed a nervous look while moving about their hands.

Moreover ——just as these circumstances were occurring.

“The goal.....of <Phantom>.”

Almost like a sigh, those brief words were muttered out from Reine’s mouth. Although this is only a trifling phrase, for some reason those words continued to linger inside Shidou’s ear.

“.....Maybe it’s an unexpected, very small and boring goal.”

“Eh.....?”

Shidou furrowed her brow while looking towards Reine’s direction. However, Reine didn’t not reply back. She merely continued to stroke the head of the stuffed bear protruding out of her pocket.

“What does that mean——”

However, just as Shidou was about to ask.

“——Coming through!”

The door suddenly flung open as the Spirits led by Tohka came onto the bridge with large plates at hand.

“Tohka? Everyone is here as well. What’s the matter?Is this a challenge to other group?”

“We are here to show appreciation to everyone! Everyone should be hungry right about now!”

“W-we.....have made rice balls for everyone.”

“Mun. Please do not hesitate to eat.”

Seeing Kotori gesture with her head to the others, everyone responded back energetically while distributing plates filled with rice balls.

Looking around again, there was numerous rice balls all wrapped in aluminum foil.

It seemed that these were specially made for Shidou, Kotori, and the others. “Ohhh.....this is amazing. Does everyone have a share?”

“Umu! Everyone, please refuel after eating this!”

After saying that, Tohka made a bright and sunny smile. Looking at that cheerful appearance, Shidou felt the tension leave his body. Even, Kotori and the other crew members who were there also made wry smiles as if seemingly forgetting the sense of nervousness floating in the air.

“It looks like you guys work hard to make these. ——Well then, let’s enjoy being spoiled just a little by those efforts. Everyone, let’s take a break.”

“Understood.”

“Wow——just as I was feeling a little bit hungry.”

While such words of gratitude were uttered out from the crew members, they each stood up from their seats to walk towards the dishes displayed in front of them.

“Well then.....I will probably choose this one.....”

“Mu! Wait Kotori, you’re rice balls are over there.”

Just as Kotori was about to reach for a rice ball on a plate, Tohka spoke out and turned her over towards another tray.

On a closer inspection, there was a note with a name on the top of each foil wrapped in the rice balls. It seems that everyone has an exclusive rice ball.

“Oh, does that mean the filling is different for each one? Mine is.....this?”

After saying that, Kotori reached out for the rice ball with her own name attached on.

Following this, Shidou, Reine, and the other Fraxinus crew members all took their own rice balls in turn.

After that was finished, Tohka and the others picked up rice balls with their own names written on them—however, for some reason, there was the feeling that they were being subtly nervous with stiffened facial expressions.

“Tohka? What’s wrong?”

“Mu.....n-no, it’s nothing.”

“? Alright, then I’m starting.”

Kotori then tore off the aluminum foil to take a bite.

Immediately, at the very next second.

“.....!?”

Kotori’s eyes suddenly sharpened as large beads of perspiration floated down her face.

“.....!!”

Kotori, who was moving bizarrely with the hand holding the rice ball, seemed to reluctantly swallow what was in her mouth. Then, with trembling shoulders, she let out a large exhale.

“Kotori.....? What’s wrong?”

“T-that’s what’s wrong.....”

When questioned by Shidou, Kotori looked at the cross section of the rice ball with a groan before bitterly slamming it down.

Curious, Shidou picked up the rice ball that Kotori had just thrown for a closer inspection—then, he pursed his brow up.

“Cor-coriander.....?”

That's right, inside Kotori's rice ball was crammed full of parsley and other herbs that she abhorred to eat.

".....Eh, what is this, are you trying to bully me?"

Having almost been brought to tears, Kotori glared at the direction of Tohka and the others. However, Tohka shook her head no in response.

"You're wrong. In order to defeat DEM, we've decided to overcome foods that we're not good at. So for our rice balls.....we also added food we don't like."

While trying to put on a brave front, it was clear that there a degree of somberness in her expression. Still, Tohka gulped down the rice ball in her hand. Following that lead, the other Spirits also took a bite of the rice ball in their hands as well.

".....! Ugh....."

"Uhh.....smells awful....."

"M-Mun, Muku will not yield....."

With tears in their eyes, their bodies contorted in pain. From beginning to end, only Origami was eating with a constant facial expression.

"Well, now.....Sh-Shidou too, will overcome this challenge."

"Eh.....?"

From what Tohka had told, Shidou looked again to the rice ball in his hand. It looked just like an ordinary delicious rice ball. But after seeing that scene unfold just now, it honestly seemed like a dangerous weapon.

".....Uhh, I want to hear just in case, what did you guys put in my rice ball?"

With cold sweat peering out as he inquired, Tohka muttered back while struggling to raise one arm above the ground.

“I felt troubled by Shidou’s rice balls, since there’s nothing that Shidou won’t eat.”

“Consent. We’ve been carefully considering everything about Shidou up until the very end.”

“Ufufu.....darling, I can help you eat it if it’s too hard?”

With these words, Spirits moved to block the path of retreat from Shidou. As soon as he heard that, Shidou let out a “Huh!” sound under his breath.

“S-so, what did you put in this.....!? Ah, it is something that you can eat right!?”

“

“

“

“Please at least say something!?”

As the Spirits were still smiling, Shidou let out a loud scream.



It is often said that plants sleep around midnight—the same time that people do. But nowadays, there were not many streets in the city where lights faded away even during 2 AM in the morning.

Through the windows of private homes where light shines sparsely, to street lights drawing moths to a flame, to convince store where light shines brightly constantly. If it was an office town, there would be a light source that would ignore the typical labor hours upheld by the law.

Under each light, there would shine under an ordinary human being minding his own business. Just like a gentle cycle rotation, this never ceases.

Well, after humans create such a society, it would mean that restful grasslands are rarely seen in such urban areas. Yet, in this sense, there will also not be any mistakes just made in darkness.

With the street lights lit, even if you don't confirm the situation underneath one's feet, one can still safety progress.

Nonetheless——right now the town looked quite different.

Even so, there was almost no sign of human activity here.

To be more accurate, from the windows of office buildings, apartments, or other business facilities, one can see the silhouette of people.

However, all of them were either collapsed onto the floor or their desks, as if fallen into a coma or some other state of lethargy.

The entire street had fallen asleep, a truly abnormal phenomena. From this lack of realism, people would start to wonder if there was a poison gas leak spreading throughout the city or if they were shooting for a large thriller movie.

However, this city had neither been disrupted by terrorists transferring chemical weapons, nor favored as a scenic spot by an investor promoting strong support for a film producer.

All of this was because of——a dark shadow lurking on the ground.

That's right; it was because of the shadow.

Even in the dark streets.

Even on the walls of large buildings.

Even inside a room illuminated by light.

Underneath all the sleeping people, the black color was crawling without exception.

“_____”

In the center of that place, a single voice was heard.

Tokisaki Kurumi pressed both her hands together and looked down to concentrate.

< City of Devouring Time>, an extension of Kurumi’s shadow which absorbs the time of anyone that came in contact—the power to steal the very lives of others.

For Kurumi, having the angel of time <Zafkiel> boasted a great deal of power. However, as a price, every time a bullet is used, it would cost a bit of the user’s time.

Of course, even for a Spirit, Kurumi’s own time alone was not enough for the immense amount needed for her goal.

Inevitably, it was necessary for her to supplement her time from outside as she anticipated a large-scale battle or sustained serious injury.

However, this was the first time that Kurumi had implemented such a large scale replenishment. Usually, the people in a single building were enough. The more time she absorbed the more conspicuous her actions will appear to other’s radar.

However, right now, it was no longer possible to keep worrying about such matters.

Tomorrow, DEM Industries was intending to aim for Shidou’s head with all of their might. In order to defeat them and defend Shidou, she needed to acquire even more power. To achieve this—it was necessary to absorb the time of an entire town.

Of course, she was targeting a town far away from Tenguu city. Although the goal was replenishing time, if smelled out by either <Ratatoskr> or DEM, it would likely end up costing all of her consumed extra time.

“——Me.”

As Kurumi spoke out, the same voice resonated from within the darkness. Then, Kurumi calmly opened her eyes.

She had strategically placed numerous clones at multiple points surrounding herself. Alongside them, they were all using < City of Devouring Time> to encompass the entire city.

“It’s about time soon.”

“Yes——”

After Kurumi whispered softly, she slowly raised one hand.

Then, an archaic pistol flew out from the shadow and into the elevated hand.

"<Zafkiel> — the Eight Bullet <Het>."

After Kurumi muttered that out, the shadows sucked into the pistol's muzzle, loading it with the desired bullet.

Kurumi then aligned the muzzle against her own temple and pulled the switch without any hesitation.

“Bang”, accompanied by that dry sound, Kurumi’s head slightly flickered from the recoil.

At the next moment, Kurumi's swaying body had split into two.

The Eight Bullet <Het>. The bullet within <Zafkiel>'s arsenal that allowed her to recreate Kurumi's past in the form of a temporal clone.

Kurumi glimpsed at the newly born clone before moving her lips again——

"————The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet
<Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>,
The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The
Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight
Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet
<Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>

The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The
Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight
Bullet The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>,
The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The
Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight
Bullet <Het>, <The Eight Bullet Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet
<Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>,
The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The
Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight
Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet
<Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>, The Eight Bullet <Het>,
The Eight Bullet <Het>.”

Countless shots fired.

Countless and countless shots fired.

Countless, countless, countless shots fired.

Continuing to load shadows into the pistol and firing against her temple. With every shot fired, the number of clones gradually increased. Like the cries of a newborn baby, they dipped into the shadow.

“——Fu.”

Working continuously for a long period of time, after increasing her number of clones by about a thousand, Kurumi finally let out a sigh of exhaustion.

“Are you alright, me.”

"I'm fine——compared to that, hurry back into the shadow and head to the next place."

After Kurumi said that, she closed her eyes once again.

Although there was assistance from clones, for her to expand her shadow to such a large scale required a considerable amount of concentration. By this point, her shadow had already withdrawn back to its normal size under her feet.

An entire town. Although Kurumi did not know the exact number, the <City of Devouring Time> had absorbed the time of tens of thousands of people concentrated underneath Kurumi's feet.

Although she wanted to keep the replenishment to a level where people won't die, she couldn't make fine adjustments for everyone. As a result, the elderly and ill with not much life remaining might have already gone to heaven. Perhaps, Kurumi may have robbed them of their last moments which they could have spent with family, lovers, friends—the people that they love.

“

However. No—it was precisely because of that Kurumi couldn't stop now. Returning back to 30 years ago and return everything back to nothing. That way, everything that Kurumi had done in both the present and past will have never happened.

Before that purpose, everything else is trivial.

Kurumi continued to withdraw into her shadow.

Her posture resembled a nun praying to God. A prayer for forgiveness—an unspoken utterance lost in the silence.



“

Nighttime inside <Fraxinus>'s rest area, Shidou was drinking a cup of milk tea while looking up at the starry sky.

Although one often says that it is impossible to see a starry sky within a city, from the aerial warship floating 15,000 meters above the ground, it was able to overlook the sky full of stars.Well, it won't be a metaphor to say that Shidou had already swum through the sea of stars before.

“Haha.”

Shidou inadvertently laughed in self-deprecation.

Thinking about it again, it was absurd. It was something that would be unbelievable when heard by someone else.

Not just the story of swimming in the stars. For the past year——no, since 5 years ago, there were a number of events that occurred to himself that went beyond the realm of common sense.

As he was musing this over ——

“——Shidou?”

Suddenly, a voice from behind interrupted his thought process.

Looking over, it was Tohka standing to the entrance of the lounge area in her pajamas. Like himself, the Spirits were temporarily living in the residential area of <Fraxinus>.

“Oh, Tohka, what’s wrong? Can’t sleep?”

“Umu.....Miku’s sleeping habits are terrible.”

“Really?”

“Well, it’s like crawling on the floor and trying to get into someone else’s bed.”

“.....Is that really a sleeping habit?”

Shidou bitterly smiled with sweat dropping from his cheeks. Even at such a time, they were acting like usual.

Then, Tohka asked a question while tilting her head.

“Shidou, what are you doing here?”

“Ah, just here thinking for a bit.”

Hearing what Shidou had said, Tohka groaned out a small “muu” sound as if recognizing what was going on.

It can't be helped. After all the day after tomorrow.....no, the date was changed, so tomorrow is the decisive battle against DEM. Being tense should be taken for granted.

“Uh.....ah, well, that's true.”

“Muu?”

Tohka tilted her head slightly in confusion to Shidou's words.

“It's about the matter with Kurumi.....”

Certainty, Shidou must win the battle against DEM and survive.

However, for the true goal beyond that——in order to seal Kurumi, Shidou had yet to come up with a complete answer.

“I.....have to save Kurumi. It's my responsibility after being saved by Kurumi countless times. However, what I think as salvation can it really be consider the same for Kurumi?Honestly, I don't really know.”

Yes, the momentary glimpse he saw of Kurumi's life through the Tenth Bullet <Yud>.

Grievances, fury, and coupled with a duty to avenge——a miserable resume that longed for a tremendous wish.

Learning of that, Shidou had been thinking.

Kurumi's idea of salvation alongside his own idea of salvation. A method to make them both coexist.

However, no matter how much thought went in, Shidou still could not arrive at an answer.

“ ”

Hearing what was said, Tohka took in a sigh while keeping the same wonderful expression.

With the sound of slippers moving across the floor, Tohka moved closer to Shidou.

“Can I sit next to you?”

“Oh, of course.”

After being given a reply, Tohka nodded slightly while taking a seat right beside him.

Then, Tohka bent her knees forwards.

“Come.”

“Eh?”

“Alright, come here.”

Then, as she finished speaking in an indifferent tone, she seized his shoulders forcefully and dragged him towards her.

It was just like—the posture for a lap pillow.

“T-Tohka?”

While Shidou was surprised by the sudden situation, Tohka took the time to gently stroke his forehead.

“How is it? I saw before on “Together with Oka-sama”. It seems to be a way to relax people.”

“.....Haha.”

After hearing that, Shidou involuntarily laughed.

Then, he remembered.

Last June, when Kurumi had first appeared and he was mentally crushed by her acts of brutality, it was Tohka who had come forth to give him the courage to continue forward.

“.....Thank you, Tohka. I’ve always been helped by you.”

After Shidou had said that, Tohka’s fingertips trembled for a moment before they fell into mutual silence.

A few seconds later, Tohka finally opened her lips to speak.

“.....There’s no such thing. I’m the one who must apologize to Shidou.”

“Eh?”

Hearing these sudden words, Shidou interjected curiously. But then, Tohka continued on quietly.

“.....If it wasn’t for Kurumi, Shidou would have died. After hearing about that incident, there was a feeling pinching my chest. Then.....I had the idea that if Shidou had never met me, Shidou would have never suffered from such a thing.”

After Tohka finished speaking, she silently clenched her lip as Shidou felt faint shivering conveyed to the back of his head.

“Tohka.....”

Shidou responded back softly while grabbing back Tohka’s hand.

“What are you saying? I——have always felt that it was wonderful that I got to meet you at that time.

“But.....”

Hearing that almost faded reply, Shidou tightly grasped Tohka’s hands as if to cover her voice.

"I did encounter a lot of danger. Whenever a new Spirit emerged, they would also be involved in some sort of serious matter. But compared to that, everyone also gave me many, many irreplaceable things which are enough to cover all the bad things. All this made it impossible for me to imagine not having you in my life."

——It was the same for each encounter so far.

The inevitable chance encounter with Tohka.

The meeting the gentle Spirit, Yoshino.

The encounter with Kurumi, who was called the worst Spirit.

Re-sealing Kotori and remembering that fateful day from five years ago.

Presenting a third option to the Yamai sisters, who wanted to continue living without killing each other.

The battle with Miku over the Spirits, and their subsequent collaboration.

The clash of wits with Natsumi, who had an angel that allowed her to freely transform.

Reconciliation with Origami after rewriting the world.

The strategy for Nia, who could not trust others.

And finally, the meeting with Mukuro within the vast cosmos.

And now, DEM was aiming for Shidou's life.

No, Shidou had already been killed by them over 200 times.

Even when trapped in this vigorous wave of arduous hardship, he still couldn't blame anyone.

However——

“I’ve never regret it. Even if I had all my memories up until today, and returned to my past before meeting Tohka—I would still reach my hand out to Tohka.”

“Shidou.....”

With tears in her eyes, Tohka held onto Shidou’s hand.

Forcing a bitter smile, it wasn’t until now that Shidou felt ashamed of his own words.

“.....Ah, no, that wasn’t it. If he returned back to the past with his present memories, the things that he wouldn’t do would be practicing sure-kill techniques, creating random character scenarios, and writing mysterious poems.....well, without Kurumi’s angel, that sort of matter——”

Halfway through that statement, Shidou slightly furrowed his brow. It was a faint light. However, a single possibility caught his attention.

“.....Mu? Shidou, what’s the matter?”

“It’s nothing.....more than that, Tohka.”

“What’s wrong?”

“.....Can we continue this for a little bit longer?”

After Shidou said that, Tohka replied back with a gentle “yes”.

Chapter 4: Footsteps of Demise

“.....Hey, what is that?”

“Un? Ah, that’s a traffic light. The color of the light shows whether we can pass.”

“What about that?”

“Mailbox. Once you put a letter in, you can send it to the designated place.”

“Then what about that?”

“Vending machines. You can buy drinks by putting money in.

“Well then——”

Speaking only halfway, Mio suddenly stopped.

“I’m sorry. It seems that I’ve been going on for a while now.”

Hearing Mio’s apology, the boy shook his head as if to say that “it was nothing”.

“Don’t worry about it. It’s the first time you’ve ever seen those things. It would be hard for you to not be interested in them.”

While saying that, the boy also looked around.

Neatly arranged buildings lined up on both sides of the paved road. Telegraph poles stood at equal intervals on each side with electric wires spread across the sky.

Meanwhile within this setting, there were both pedestrians and vehicles rushing back and forth. It was a common sight for the boy who lived in this neighborhood. Still, if this were his first time ever seeing such scene, he probably would have shared Mio’s reaction.

That’s right. After about two weeks since Mio had first meet the boy, they had decided to leave the house to excursion outside.

Mio, who had read through all of the books at home, could now speak Japanese as smoothly as a native speaker who had lived in Japan for many years. Then, after learning a certain degree of proper etiquette, behavior, and common sense, they finally received permission from the overseer of the Takamiya household, Mana, to be able to go out.

Needless to say, the two of them were walking in the opposite direction of where the spacequake had occurred. Although the city was still in a panic from being struck by an unprecedented disaster, people still needed to work in order provide food on the table. In order to accomplish such things, it was necessary to regain the foundation of everyday life even if there was an enormous crater.

Televisions continued broadcasting overwhelmingly about spacequakes, especially discussing why such a disaster occurred and was repeating. Yet, residents who lived nearby the sites were surprisingly calm as they continued on with their lives.

“Wow.....uh.....ah——I’ve read about this in a book.”

“.....”

While watching Mio walk around the road, gazing everything with interest, the boy stared at her while being lost in his thoughts.

Nowadays, her language skills were by far more proficient to the extent that it was not comparable to when they first met. Overtime, Mio’s language skills had evolved to the point where she was able to recall memories that were not clear beforehand.

However, there were still many things that she did not understand.

No——it was priceless because of the increase in communication skills that caused the things not well understood to increase.

Mio was not an ordinary human being. On the contrary, she wasn’t even an organism born through the natural process.

——Spirit. When expressing her own existence in Japanese, she said that word came the closest to describing herself.

A supernatural lifeform brought forth by mysterious technique resembling sorcery or magic.

However, while looking at her back curiously, he couldn't sense even the slightest degree of dangerous ambience, but rather it was better to say——

“——What's the matter?”

“.....Wa!”

Having unexpectedly drawn closer to his face, the boy jolted his shoulders back in surprise. Mio tilted her head curiously while looking at the boy.

“N-no, it's nothing.”

“.....Is that so?”

As if remembering something, Mio fixed her posture upright before once again asking something curiously.

“Compared to that, what is that thing?”

Having pointed towards something again, Shidou lifted his face and gazed towards the direction of Mio's fingertips.

Placed in the store front of the game center, it was a large rectangular box that made a lively sound. Several stuffed toys were arranged inside the glass box, there beady eyes starting to attract nearby pedestrians.

“Ah, it's a crane game. There's a robotic arm at the top of the box, right? You have to operate it from the outside to grab the stuffed toy inside.”

“Oh? That's something interesting to think about.”

After the boy briefly explained the game, Mio took a brisk footstep towards the crane game, intently looking inside the box.

Was she looking at the fancy bear inside? The boy thought to himself while slowly walking towards her side. Then, he stared at the box before speaking.

“Shall I get it out for you?”

“.....Eh?”

Hearing those words, Mio raised her head alongside showing an expression indicating that she didn't expect that at all.

The boy cracked a smile seeing that look. After placing the money in the machine, he began to follow the instructions for operating the metallic claw.

Ten minutes later, although it was not a splendid campaign.....he somehow managed to capture the bear doll inside before his wallet ran dry.

“Come on——! Just like that——!”

To tell the truth, because of the continual previous failures, the success exhilarated more than it probably should have. At the moment, the doll fell into the exit, the boy let out a large shout in spite of the presence of the people around him. The customers at the game center and nearby pedestrians were surprised to hear this before walking away with amused smiles.

“.....”

As the boy's face flushed red, he tightened his shoulders as he took out the bear plushy.

“A-anyway. Here, Mio.”

“.....?”

Looking down, Mio did seem to understand what the boy was saying or the reasons behind his peculiar behavior. Meanwhile, the boy, who still felt a glow of embarrassment, grabbed Mio hand to give her the bear plushy.

“.....? Are you giving this to me?”

“Um, I captured that for that reason.Or do you not want it? I saw you look at it so diligently, so I thought you might have liked it.”

“Like.....”

Mio repeated that word while staring intently at the stuffed doll she was handed with.

“Like.....feelings of affection.....being strongly interested in something.....”

Mio murmured as if reciting definitions from a dictionary while holding the bear toy against her chest.

“——That’s it.Uh, this should be the feeling of like. A way of expression appreciation to you. Expressing gratitude.No, it should be.....”

Mio gestured the momentary idea in her mind, Mio immediately turned to the boy.

“——Thank you. I’m very happy. I like you.”

Just then, she said that with a cheerful smile.

“.....Eh!?”

That smile felt like it had pierced his heart in a dream-like illusion.

Because of those unexpected words, the boy face flushed red as he forcibly looked away.

It was like a brand new page was being written about his life with Mio starting from then.

For the boy, it was an irreplaceable beginning.

——However, the boy hadn’t noticed yet.

The meaning behind the existence of the girl called Mio.

And the existence of humans who would pursue that meaning.





As morning arrived, there were several students in route to Raizen High School.

During the chilly February morning, every student was wearing a jacket over their uniform or mufflers around their necks to resist the cold weather.

In spite of that, there were also those like Hiroto Tonomachi that were cheerfully walking in the cold air with only blazers on top of their shirts.

“Good morning you guys. The weather is nice out today as well!”

After saying that, Tonomachi waved to a trio of female students whom were walking down the street.

A tall girl, a girl of medium size and build, and a girl with glasses, they were the celebrated trio from class 204, also more commonly known as the Ai Mai Mii trio.

However, the three of them, despite their usual so energetic moods, coldly flicked their mufflers around after seeing Tonomachi.

“Good morning.....that said, it’s completely cloudy today.”

“Isn’t it cold Tonomachi-kun? We’re freezing just looking at you.”

“There are people like this in elementary school, nicknamed the wind, who wear short sleeved shorts even during the wintertime.”

After Ai, Mai, and Mii spoke out in turn, Tonomachi smirked as he puffed up his chest proudly.

“So you’ve already notice my wildness. After all, girls like robust men, someone on the TV this morning said so as well.”

“.....You saw?”

“No, I didn’t see. I only watch the basic morning news.”

“That’s true. Ah, I heard there was a collective coma incident. How scary——.”

After saying that, Ai, Mai, and Mii continued to talk while pushing Tonomachi off to the side. However, Tonomachi was not discouraged and raised his voice to attract attention.

“Anyway! With this I can also send to my girlfriend——Achoo!”

While in the middle of speaking, Tonomachi let out a loud sneeze, causing Ai, Mai, and Mii to have glance at each other in silence.

“Wearing so little and catching a cold, you’re still far from being wild.”

“Anyway, compared to the people you’ve never met in person; why not ask for the opinions of the girls standing in front of you?”

“Oh yeah, for example, Yamabuki Ai-shi here has high praises for schoolboys who are certain to catch colds at the turn of the season. What amazing unrequited longing they must have, oh master.”

“Hey wait a minute you guys.”

As Yamabuki suddenly brought the topic of romantic matters, he suddenly tried to stop her by grabbing the neck of her clothing. However, Ai noticed immediately and twirled around to hide behind Mai like a shield.

Then, as Tonomachi was shivering from his shoulders as a result of the coldness, his eyes widened as if noticing something.

“Having a cold.....eh, was that right? Well, I’m happy about Yamabuki’s feelings, but should I be shocked or.....”

“Wow, here is a bothersome misunderstanding! No worries, the person whom I like is not Tonomachi-kun!”

While still hiding and using Mai as a support, Ai shouted out from behind the girl. In response, Tonomachi contorted his body as he said “Eh, let me dream just a little bit longer——”

“! Spacequake alarm.....!”

“No way, seriously?”

In response to the sudden spacequake alarm, Tonomachi, Aii, Mai, Mii, and the other nearby students all clamored in a hurry.

Regardless, there was no too much visible confusion. After all, Tenguu City has among the highest spacequake frequency in the world, so the prevalence of shelters was a must. Students were also trained in various evacuation drills, so it was clear to them of how to deal with these situations.

“Ohhh——.....do we really have to have a spacequake when it is this cold out——.”

“What are you talking about. Come on, it’s dangerous to avoid taking refuge. We have to head to the school shelter.”

“I know.”

While still exchanging conversations without too much tension, they headed for the shelter at the basement of the school.

Just because the alarm rang, it doesn’t mean that the spacequake would happen immediately. Rather, it would be more dangerous to rush out chaotically in a hurry.

Tonomachi and the others calmly reached the entrance and began to enter the refugee in order.

——At that moment

“.....Hmm?”

While near the entrance to the underground, Tonomachi stopped suddenly, his attention being drawn towards the sky.

‘Uh? What’s wrong Tonomachi-kun?’

“Nothing.....just now did you guys see something in the sky?”

“Ha?”

Hearing this, Ai, Mai, and Mii looked up the sky before turning their necks back shortly afterwards.

“.....What was it?”

“Well.....how to say it, was it like a huge battleship in the sky? Something like that?”

“.....”

The trio said nothing in response to Tonomachi. No, to be accurate, while looking at him with a degree of pity, they whispered slowly in a low voice.

“Tonomachi-kun has finally lost it.....”

“No, isn’t it like an elementary schooler who thinks of something that can only be seen by himself?”

“No, whichever way, it still looks pretty bad.”

“Say, at least don’t let me hear you talk.”

Tonomachi stared intently at the sky again in suspicious, but then waved the thought away as he headed into the refugee.



——From the sky, an artificial despair fell down.

The airships of Deus Ex Machina, a power far beyond humanity’s reach, casted huge silhouettes overlooking the city below as they tore through the clouds. They looked like destroyers heralding the apocalypse, reminiscent of if the king of hell had descended down to bring ruin onto the fertile earth.

Conquering the sky, their number ranged to thirty.

That's right. Almost all of the ships own by DEM had gathered around the skies of Tenguu City in order to grasp against <Ratatoskr>.

“——They are here.”

Siting at the captain's seat onboard <Fraxinus>, Kotori stared at the main monitor screen while twirling the stick of a Chupa Chups in her mouth.

“Everyone from DEM has come welcome you, Shidou. Seems like you're quite popular.”

While speaking in a joking manner, they turned their attentions to each other, as Shidou responded back by shrugging with a bitter smile.

“Ahhh.....I'm moved to the point of tears. But unfortunately, this doesn't quite fit my tastes.”

“Ahaha.....then it can't be helped. We'll have to ask them to head back.”

As she said so, Kotori stood up from the commander's seat, her jacket swaying against her legs as she issued out commands towards the <Ratatoskr> crew members at the other end of the communication equipment.

“As <Fraxinus>'s commander, I Itsuka Kotori, would like to first thank everyone for your aid.

——Then, has everyone had a chance to look at the monitor? An unhinged visitor has appeared in our city. The lowest and worst DV man, who is trying to deprive the power of the Spirits in the most crude and brutal way possible. Ah, how utterly repulsive and unsightly. Only these men who want to rule women by force would peruse them so relentlessly only to discard them after being finished. Having done so many disgusting acts, how can one not feel any disdain? Hard to understand, I wonder if they see all women as timid mothers?”

After saying that, Kotori let out a deliberate sigh, which invoked a small laugh from the other side of the communicator.

Kotori perked up the corners of her mouth before continuing.

“Now, let us teach some manners to these unruly people.

Let them know the proper way to treat a woman.

A more elegant way to escort.

——Our method of proceeding with a war (date).”

“Understood!”

As if to respond to that declaration, a might voice resounded back from the lower bridge and opposite side of the communicator.

Suddenly, it felt that there was a force in the air that jolted Shidou to instinctively stand upright.

“What a surge of passion.....”

“Umu, Kotori looks really cool.....”

Tohka, who was standing beside Shidou, gave a small nod in agreement. Hearing this, Kotori turned around while shrugging her shoulders.

“If everyone felt the same impression as Tohka, then it’s all the better. After all, it’s the commander’s job to elevate everyone’s fighting spirit. —— But pure fanaticism is useless. A cool head and a passionate heart, that is ideal.”

She spoke out while raising a single finger.

Shidou let out a light sigh as he admired how professional his younger sister had composed herself to be.

However, Kotori slightly frowned while continuing to speak.

“——Although that is true, you must be aware that the current situation cannot be said to be beneficial to us.

Compared to the enemy fleet of 30 warships, <Ratatoskr> only has five when including <Fraxinus>. The enemy also has ten times the number of Wizards; moreover, it's unclear how many thousands of <Bandersnatch> and <Nibelcol> will appear. Although the performance of our realizer manifestation device is superior, if we are struck first by a frontal assault by the enemy, we would surely lose.”

“.....”

Hearing what Kotori had said, the Spirits lined up on the bridge all took in a deep breath.

Kotori then turned to everyone and interjected with a “however”.

“The only ones who can break the current situation——are you guys.”

While gazing into the expression of each Spirit in turn, Kotori continued on.

“.....I understand it is truly distorted for the commander of an organization dedicated to protecting Spirits to ask for assistance. I'm truly embarrassed of that.

But——please. Please lend us your strength. As the commander of <Ratatoskr>.....”

Having suddenly cut herself off, Kotori lowered her head while mumbling.

“Err, no.....”

“As Shidou's sister, I ask of you——please help by brother.”

“Of course!”

Tohka raised her voice while taking a step forward.

Following that lead, the other Spirits all nodded in agreement.

“Please also let us.....make a contribution to help.”

“That’s right! Rather, we’ll get angry if you told us to stand on the sidelines!”

“You said that it’s the commander’s role to raise the mood before war? Ahaha, imōto-chan isn’t acting very commander-like right now.”

“Everyone.....”

Kotori quickly wiped away the small tears that dripped down after hearing everyone’s words.

Afterwards, while clearing her throat in order to regain her composure, she raised her face up again with a determined look.

“——Thank you. However, since what’s coming up next is very important.
——Nia, can I think that this conversation won’t be intruded on by
<Beelzebub>?”

When asked by Kotori, Nia responded back with a rather exaggerated nod.

“Un, for <Beelzebub> right now, it should already take a long time to search something, so it should already be no problem.So what kind of crafty scheme are you planning? Are you going to use Mukku-chin’s angel to open a large door for a surprise full out assault?”

Nia spoke out while mimicking movements for shadowboxing. Meanwhile Mukuro muttered out an “hmm.....” sound while elevating her brow up in thought.

“My apologies, but it may be impossible for Muku. Since reiryoku has been sealed, long distance travel has become demanding.....”

“Ah, is that so?”

“I mean, I wouldn’t have allowed you to do that even if that worked. Naturally, we have to be wary of the preparations made by the other side, who knows what sorts of traps they will have. The moment after passing through that hole,

we could be perceived by Ellen and have our heads severed——that sort of thing is certainly possible.”

While shrugging her shoulders, Kotori turned her attention to Origami and Mana.

“Would you let me hear more about it, Origami, Mana——the plan to make those irritating <Bandersnatch> powerless.”

“I understand.”

Origami and Mana looked at each other and gave a mutual nod before responding back to Kotori’s words.

“But before that, I have something I want to confirm first with Maria.”

“? What is it, Origami?”

Responding to the sound of Origami’s voice, Maria’s voice echoed from the bridge’s speakers. Then, Origami spoke out while watch at the monitor screen displaying the letters MARIA.

“——As I said before, the <Bandersnatch> is based off of DEM’s new display device <Ashcroft • β >. If we can determine its detailed structure, can we give off a jamming signal to interfere with them?”

After Origami was finished, Maria pondered for a moment before replying.

“Although it is theoretically feasible, it’ s not realistic. If you can steal the detailed design data from DEM, then it would be different story——.”

“What if I say <Ashcroft•β> is a model made from the brain of the Wizard Artemisia Ashcroft?”

“.....What did you say?”

It was Kotori who distorted her expression in response to Origami’s words. Shidou raised his brow in confusion.

“Artemisia.....is that the woman who was with Ellen?”

“That’s right. The former ace Wizard of Britain’s anti-Spirit force, the SSS. Mana replied back while crossing her arms.

“DEM’s realizer manifestation device originally had to be controlled from the outside using the human brain. But by tracing her brain, they succeeded in incorporating an autonomous control function in the realizer manifestation device.”

“——If we can catch her, can you write a jamming code for <Ashcroft • β > by analyzing her brainwave data?”

“.....Perhaps, it is possible.”

After a moment of silence, Maria finally responded back. As the Spirits and the crew members all let out an excited “Ohh!” sound.

However, Maria quickly interjected to simmer down the mood.

“Still, it’s based on the premise that we can successfully capture Artemisia. Her magical power is only second to Ellen. Even with all of the Spirits here, it wouldn’t be easy to capture her.”

“——I have an idea about that matter.”

“Idea?”

After being questioned by Shidou, Origami and Mana nodded at the same time.

“Hard to say, she has always been skeptical of DEM’s method of doing things. It’s difficult to imagine that she would follow DEM so obediently. Considering that she can’t remember me or Origami, it’s likely that her memory has been modified.”

“Yes. That’s why——I want to borrow everyone’s power.”

Origami spoke out the battle plan in an indifferent manner.

Hearing that proposal, the other Spirits couldn't help but stare in amazement.

"Kaka, it's quite interesting. Certainly, it's possible that this is true."

"Consent. As expected of Origami-sensei, it's a great plan."

"Hmm.....well, we should at least give it a try."

As the each spoke out in turn, the Spirits all gave a show of approval. Kotori seemed to be in thought for a while, but not much longer, she raised her face as if having made a decision.

"——I understand. But be careful."

"Umu!"

".....Alright, I understand. We absolutely won't overdo it."

As Tohka gave a powerful affirmative nod, Natsumi gave a quick nod before shifting her line of sight.

As Kotori returned the gesture to the both of them, she then moved to look at the screen displaying the letters MARIA.

"Now then.....next up is you, Maria. Even if the current strategy is successful, there is still the large army of <Nibelcol>. If we don't do anything about that, it will be impossible to reach Westcott."

"I already know."

Maria repeated those words once again as she replied back in a quiet voice

"The <Nibelcol> are a pseudo-Spirit created from the power of <Beelzebub>. From that, it is also true from the result of the analysis then——"

Then, Maria explained the countermeasure for the <Nibelcol> to everyone. Consequently, one after another, the faces of the audience that heard were flushed with an astonished color.

“Wha.....are you serious, Maria.”

“T-that, is that method...really okay.....?”

“What are you saying Maria! Don’t you understand the situation!? I can’t allow you to this!”

Everyone’s emotions were in an uproar as Kotori let out the loudest protest. But it was no wonder that they were After all, Maria’s scheme was surprisingly excessive.

“Of course I also understand the current situation as well. How absurd my proposal may sound. ——However, just as Kotori said, we cannot win without doing something about the <Nibelcol>. I assure you there is no other way to neutralize the <Nibelcol>.”

“But.....even so that is too——”

“——No.”

Having been silently listening up until now, Shidou interrupted Kotori. Then, he raised his head while clenching his fist.

“Let’s do it. If this is the only way. Rather.....it would better to say that this method fits our style the most.”

“Shidou.....”

With an uneasy expression, Kotori look at Shidou for a moment——but immediately afterwards the emotions seen there rustled like a piercing gaze.

“.....Yeah. Yes, you’re not wrong.”

Then, with a swish of her jacket on her shoulders, Kotori turned to look forward at the bridge.

“Tell the entire fleet. Share the strategy with everyone! Make sure the plan is successful!”

“Understood!”

The sound of the entire crew responding back to Kotori shook the entire bridge.

With her entire body passionately immersed in the mood, Kotori raised the corners of her mouth.

“——Let’s teach them a lesson. Let them know how ridiculous it is to fight against us in Tenguu City.”



The metallic devil approached the skies of Tenguu City, DEM Industries’ Aerial Fleet.

While sailing from the back, the voice of the crew echoed on the bridge of the flagship <Lemegeton>.

“——It’s has already been confirmed that there are five airships above Tenguu City.”

“Identification and reaction analysis. All of them belong to <Ratatoskr>.”

Amidst this chaotic environment, the sound from each ship intermingled with the communicators passed through the speakers and resounded in this noisy place.

“<Honorius>, battle preparations are ready.”

“<Almandal>, <Bandersnatch> are ready for deployment.”

“<Galdrabók>, the Wizard unit is also ready here.”

“——Good.”

Receiving the countless reports trembling in his eardrum, Westcott voiced an exaggerated approval of consent.

Then, he turned to the monitor displaying <Ratatoskr>'s warships, raising the corners of his lips like a predator taking aim at its target.

“Looks like <Nightmare> had already conveyed my message. ——Or is it us that hasn't notice that this is already another world she has reset?”

He stroked his chin while smirking.

At that moment, Ellen, who was right beside him, looked up at the monitor and voiced her opinion.

“Five ships huh.——So <Ratatoskr> seems to be mobilizing all of their power.”

“Ahh. That was a good call. If I were the commander, I would have done the same. If they don't go on the offensive now, then they have no eyes for victory.”

“Offensive? Aren't they supposed to be the one's protecting Itsuka Shidou?”

As Ellen tilted her head curiously, Westcott replied back with an “ah” while point his finger at his own heart.

“They will probably aim for either mine or your head. For the reason behind this battle formation, they understand that if we are not here, DEM will naturally disintegrate.”

Ellen faintly frowned after Westcott had finished.

“Since you've already anticipated this lke, you're better off staying at a safe place.”

Ellen replied back with shrewd concern; however, Westcott slowly shook his head in response.

“They are here to face us with all of their power because I am here. Even a one in a thousand or one in a million chance would not change the light of hope in their eyes. However, if they are unable to see even the slightest chance for a

reversal, then they would most likely choose to flee. That is too troublesome. Even with <Beelzebub>, it would be very annoying if they hide Itsuka Shidou and run away.”

After Westcott had finished, the <Nibelcol> gathering around the captain seat began speaking in sync in agreement to what he had said.

“It’s just like that.”

“Ellen, you don’t even understand something of that level?”

“Is it because your brain is aging? Why don’t you try some mental exercises?”

“

“Calm down, Ellen. Do you want to reduce the number of allies before the battle even starts?”

Behind them, Artemisia, prevent Ellen from slowly raising her hand. Ellen snorted back in an uproar.

“Well, don’t feel bad Ellen. After all, that isn’t the only reason.”

“.....What do you mean by that?”

“This is our battle, a revolution we started to change the world. ——Naturally, I can’t let you head off to the battlefield alone.”

“

Ellen started at Westcott’s eyes in silence for a while before nodding her head and lowering her gaze.

“.....Yeah, that’s true. You’re right, Ike.”

“Ahh.”

After her brief reply, the nearby <Nibelcol>, all had a slightly bored expression as if not understanding what was just said.

“Well then, shall we get started ——captain.”

“Yes.”

In response to Westcott’s command, the captain of <Lemegeton>, Ernest Brennan, whose rank was equivalent to a commander, voiced out the commands.

“——Then let the battle begin. Each ship, deploy the first wave of <Bandersnatch>.”

“Roger that.”

The captains of the other aerial fleets scattered around in response to Brennan’s instructions.

At the same time, the storage hatch of the aerial ship displayed on the monitor opened, injecting out an innumerable amount of <Bandersnatch> from the inside.

The scenario resembled a collective of insect eggs all hatching simultaneously. If there was a person with a phobia of closed spaces, they would likely get goosebumps at the mere sight of this. Even Ellen felt slightly unnerved at the sight.

“<Notoria>, <Picatrix>, <Albert>, prepare to launch the magical cannon. The target is the <Ratatoskr> ——airship.”

At the next moment, just as Brennan was preparing to give the firing order, several explosions were heard on the bridge.

“——What happened?”

“Yes! The <Bandersnatch> legion has been attacked!”

“What is it? Is it the <Ratatoskr> ship?”

“No, this is——.”

“——Kihihihihhi.”

Just as the crew members were reporting the situation, loud laughter was heard coming from the speakers.

Immediately afterwards, one of the monitors displayed a girl's face. Black hair that was unevenly tied on both ends and a golden clock on the shined brightly in the left eye.

The Spirit Tokisaki Kurumi. Apparently, she was looking directly at the head camera installed in the <Bandersnatch>.

“Attention please, can you hear me vile Wizard-san.”

“.....<Nightmare>.”

Ellen sharpened her gaze as she called out the designated codename. Then, a number of “Kurumi” appeared on the main monitor projecting the sky.

“I'll hunt you guys next. You may already be scared and incontinent, but please do not run away. ”

“What did you say?”

As Ellen was raging loudly, the sound of camera being smashed was the last scene heard and seen before the image and sound disappeared. Lost in her anger, Ellen grinningly gripped her fist.

The scene of numerous <Bandersnatch> being slaughtered one after another by the Kurumi army was all reflected onto the main screen. Seeing this, captain Brennan gave out his instructions.

“Tch.....<Honorius>, cover the <Bandersnatch> legion.”

“Roger that. Barrage——”

However, the response from the <Honorius> ship captain was interrupted by a loud explosion. From the bridge's speaker, they could only hear a noise resembling a scream.

"W-what just happened?!"

"Gu.....they seemed to have been bombarded from the ground."

"From the ground.....? What is going on, the <Ratatoskr> ship hasn't made any movements yet."

".....! Captain, please look at this.....!"

As one of the crew members seemed to have noticed something, a voice was raised coming from the operations counsel. Then, a part of the main screen displayed a view of the town below <Honorius>.

"Wha——"

When he saw the scene, Brennan was rendered speechless.

But that was to be expected, after all, the place he was looking at stood a building with a magical cannon on the roof.

No, it wasn't just that. Even the homes and streets of many ordinary people, as well as buildings that look like commercial facilities, have changed from their original appearance by undergoing a threatening deformation mechanism, preparing to aim their muzzles at the sky.

Brenan's eyes widened in alarm when faced against the unexpected sight.

"What the hell is with this city.....!"

"West Tenguu block 4 building cannon has landed a hit on the enemy ship!"

"——Humpf."

Hearing the report from the crew members, Kotori made a victory pose while sitting on the captain's seat.

Then, while looking at the enemy fleet displayed on the main screen, she twirled the Chupa Chups stick in her mouth.

"Were you taken by surprise? Continuing the bombardment while shifting from block 4 to 5!"

"Understood!"

As the reply was transmitted through the communicator, magical artillery was once again released from the ground to the DEM ships.

Looking at this sight, Shidou felt a cold sweat drop down from his cheeks.

"What can I say.....it feels surreal? To think there was something like this in Tenguu city.....say, the supermarket I patron frequently just shot out a light beam....."

Then, Kotori lifted up her arms while issuing a proud huff of satisfaction.

"When <Fraxinus> was being rebuilt, why do you think we were using the underground Tenguu facility as our headquarters? Did you think that with so many device underground, there was nothing prepared on the ground as well?"

"Ah——....."

After being told by Kotori, Shidou suddenly remembered. To be sure, just as Kotori had said, <Ratatoskr> had numerous underground facilities underground of Tenguu City.

Of course, since private lands and roads cannot be tampered with, he thought that the land must have belonged to <Ratatoskr>. Still, he did not expect that there would be such equipment hidden away.

"Nevertheless, the turrets on the ground can only hold them back at best and break apart the opponent's formation. ——All ships deployed, begin the attack on the enemy ships. The Wizard support unit will assist the Spirits."

“Understood!”

Upon receiving orders from Kotori, the <Ratatoskr>, the crew members onboard began to move accordingly.

While overlooking that, Kotori turned her attention to the Spirits lined up beside the captain’s seat.

“——Everyone, please. Follow the plan.”

“Umu!”

“Kaka, at last, we are departing for battle.”

“Leaving. I’ve been anticipating this.”

“Mun, then let us depart.”

Tohka and the others all gave a nod of consent to each other before lining up to depart on the teleporter.

Onboard DEM’s flagship <Lemegeton>, various reports were chaotically distributed around.

“<Honorius>’s Permanent Territory Area declining by 10%!”

“The artillery is being re-fired!”

“The <Bandersnatch> legion is being decimated one after another!”

“Ku.....”

Captain Brennan slightly distorted his expression, seemingly flustered about how to handle the situation.

Still it was to be expected. Having arrived planning a pre-emptive assault, they were the ones who ended up being caught off guard by the other party.

However, Westcott, who had nestled himself behind the captain's seat, twisted himself with joyful pleasure.

“——Ahahahahaha.”

“.....? Mr. Westcott?”

“Is this not quite exquisite. We shall accept the challenge. Confusion and chaos in the battle is the domain of a scant army force. As long as we calm down, we can use all of our strength to land a decisive blow. ——There should be no regrets. Deploy the second batch of <Bandersnatch> and Wizard units. Oh, and ask for the support of the local AST. Let’s also give them a place for active participation.”

“Yes——!”

In response to Westcott’s commands, Brennan transmitted the orders to the rest of the fleet.

Westcott swiftly turned his attention to the strongest fighting power that DEM boasted.

“It’s just as you heard, Ellen, Artemisia, <Nibelcol>, we will meet the enemy with full power. There is only one directive. ——Those who are conspicuous, slaughter them all. For those people apart of that ridiculous <Ratatoskr>, let today be their final day of Ragnarök.”

“Yes. Victory will belong to you.”

“Understood.”

“Huh, Otou-sama, I think we alone are enough.”

As each of the three parties gave their own reply, the three beautiful devils danced into the sky.



“——Kihihihihhi. Come, let us depart we. Let us gracefully charm and ravage the enemy together.”

“Yes, yes!”

“How exciting, truly exciting!”

Follow Kurumi’s command, numerous clones climbed out from the shadows. The clones flew through the sky like a black flash, shooting down the airborne <Bandersnatch> in the air one by one with the pistols in their hands.

Kurumi’s clones versus the <Bandersnatch> legion. Although both sides were based on quantity, Kurumi’s side had the advantage in terms of individual strength. Despite the <Bandersnatch>’s efforts to advance forward, their resistance ended the moment they were pierced through the chest, arms twisted off, or shot in the head.

“Kihi! Kihihihihihhi!”

“To think that they would use such mechanical soldiers against me.”

“If you’re not going to even try, hurry up and offer the general’s head——!”

However——at the very next moment.

Several pieces of paper flew down next to the dismantled <Bandersnatch>. From there, several many maidens with lustrous dark grey hair appeared, piercing through the body of a clone with sharp precision.

“Gi——!” ”

A brief dying voice was heard from a clone before falling down to the ground.

“Me!”

“Hmm.....so you’ve come out, mass produced type.”

Kurumi turned her attention to the <Nibelcol> now licking her blood stained arm.

“Mass produced type? Should I really be hearing that coming from you?”

“I’ve thought about it before, but aren’t you all ripping of my character?”

“Take that back. You don’t get to decide who is ripping of whom.”

“——Very well. Let me present your head before your favorite Otou-sama.”

Kurumi let out a devilish grin while she and her clones all pointed their muzzles at the approaching <Nibelcol>.”



——Several sparks illuminated the sky of Tenguu City.

It was a scene too disjointed from reality.

There were several battleships in the air, along with countless Wizards. One’s field of vision was distorted by the reflection of the myriad mechanical humanoid dolls. The deformed buildings from the ground were attacking the warships above without interruption. Furthermore, the mechanical dolls were being constantly undermined by the Spirit <Nightmare>.

“Wha.....”

While watching the unexpected battlefield lay out in front of her eyes, a shocked voice squeaked out from Kusakabe Ryouko’s throat.

“What is this.....”

As Captain of AST, and as a Wizard, they had experienced many blood-filled battlefields. While not completely intact without injuries afterwards, they at least survived fighting <Princess> and <Hermit> and the other Spirits at DEM Industries Japanese Branch.

However, even for Ryouko, such a sight was too abnormal.

Compared to the usual scuffles, both the size and scale were too different. The melee covered the entire sky as the battlefield stage. In addition, among the reaction designated as enemy, it was not only Spirits, but Wizards and battleships included as well.

It was no longer merely the AST main task of countering the Spirits.

The sight to behold spreading right now was an undeniable war.

Being suddenly ordered in such a military battlefield without being informed of the reasons for dispatch, the degree of confusion of AST's main players, led by Ryouko, could be visualized.

“Captain.....”

Then, Mikie's voice was heard coming from the communicator headset.
“This is what Origami-san had said.....right?”

“.....”

Listen to Mikie's words, Ryouko remained silent for a while.

Certainly, it's true that the current situation was the same predicted by her former co-worker Tobiichi Origami two days ago.

“Sure enough, Origami-san told us to hide behind the front lines.....”

“W-what are you talking about? No matter what the form, the mission will not change. As long as there is a Spirit, it is our job to defeat it.”

“But.....”

Mikie still refused to stop.

As her superior, it was appropriate to scold Mikie for arguing against the order.....however, Ryouko just snorted and said nothing. To be honest, Ryouko's current mood was similar to Mikie's.

Even if she was a former colleague, she couldn't completely believe in Origami. However, if she would go so far as to say that the contents of what she had said were completely unfounded, that wouldn't be the case either.

Based on the various events that have occurred so far, a considerable number of doubts and mistrust has accumulated weight against DEM. Depending on the individual as well, there seemed to be people who think that a mutual understanding can be reached through communicating with the Spirits.

However, the pride and responsibilities as captain of AST had forced her to minimize these sentiments that were expected to flow.

No — not only that, but more accurately.

The moment of believing in Origami's words was the same thing as accepting that everything done up until now had been a mistake. To acknowledge that terrified herself.

At that moment, while perceiving such thinking, the communication system rang—it was a Wizard from DEM Industries.

“——Hello? Are you Captain Ryouko-san from AST?”

“.....Yes, it's me? Who is this?”

“DEM second executive Irene Fox. I appreciate the cooperation—the situation is urgent. Please launch an assault on the Spirits at this location. We will provide support for you.”

“Ha.....? Wait, how come so suddenly.”

Having not responded back to the question, the communication was cut off shortly. Just like that, a mark was projected onto the map indicating where to go.

Looking on the position being on displayed, just as Eileen had said, there was Spirit fighting against the mechanical dolls——it was <Hermit>.

“Ah, shit, what the hell is this?”

Ryouko anxiously scratched her head and let out a deep sigh before injecting energy onto the arm holding her laser gun.

“Work is work. Let’s go!”

“U-understood……!”

As Ryouko gave out her commands, the AST members responded back despite the hesitation in their voices.

While operating the thrusters attached to their backs, they formed a formation to attack <Hermit>.

“Eat this!”

“! Ka——”

As Ryouko released a barrage from her laser gun, <Hermit> responded back by gathering the cold air to form a defensive ice barrier.

Even so, it was a routine matter to be expected for a Spirit to prevent this level of attack. Ryouko issued out the next set of orders to her team members.

“Get around from behind! Pay attention to the cold air! Even the voluntary Territory will be frozen!”

“Okay——”

At that moment, the voices from her team members got interrupted. To say it more precise, it was drowned out by the loud warning sound resounding in their ears.

“Wha——”

From the approaching heat source, there was a strong energy reading coming from behind. After seeing the undisputed fact displayed in her field of vision, Ryouko choked on her breath.

But of course that would happen. The response was not something from the Spirit—it was an attack issued out by the DEM Wizard who had just sent the message.

After some brief confusion, Ryouko immediately understood.

That DEM's wizards had no intention of helping from the very beginning. Their only purpose was to create a momentary opening on the Spirits for them to exploit. That's right, alongside the AST members who were pinned; they continued to attack the Spirits——

“.....Tch!”

Everyone was strengthening their bodies in preparation for being hit by the magical artillery.

However——the expected shock never came.

The moment, just as the magical artillery was about to be burned against their backs.

“<Michael>——<Rātaibu>.”

After suddenly appearing there, the girl twisted a giant key like staff. A huge hole opened in space, sucking in the magical bombardment.

The next moment, a similar hole was created again behind the very same Wizard who had fired the magical cannon, from which the energy that was sucked in was subsequently released.

“Eh.....!?”

The Wizard, Irene Fox who was subjected to her own attack, let out a painful groan before collapsing towards the ground.

“Huh.....?”

Ryouko stared in open befuddlement at the girl who suddenly appeared in front of her eyes.

Long blonde hair and a key-shaped angel, although this was Ryouko’s first time seeing her, the glittering garments she was wearing was unmistakably the armor worn by the Spirits.

“——Hmm. You seem unlike the other people. Well, are you the *AST* that Origami was speaking of?”

“U-uh.....”

——Had they been saved by the Spirit?

From the unexpected state of affairs, Ryouko could barely let out a mumble. Then, <Hermit>, while riding the giant rabbit, revealed her appearance by releasing the giant ice wall.

“I’ve heard the situation from Origami-san.Please, you all need to stay way.”

“Yes, yes. Too much mischief and even the usual gentle Yoshinon will get angry.”

“Ha.....w-what are you.....”

“Mun, let’s go, Yoshino, Yoshinon.”

“Yes.....!”

“Okay!”

With Ryouko still in a confused state, the Spirits nodded to each other before leaping into the sky.

Then, as silence flowed in the air for a while, everyone gathered around Ryouko. Not a single one had time to process what just happened.

“.....! C-captain, are you alright!? Are you injured?”

After a few seconds, Mikie let out a voice that seemed to free her from this paralysis. Hearing that sound, Ryouko’s shoulders shook for a bit.

“Ah, yeah, I’m fine. No problems.....thanks to the Spirits.”

“.....”

As Ryouko spoke out, the AST members fell into silence once again. Sure enough, it didn’t seem that what was just seen was a mistake or hallucination. Ryouko grated against her head.

Ryouko and the others came at DEM’s request, only to likely for the intention of being discarded by DEM’s Wizards. Even worse, they were saved by the targeted Spirit.

(——The information that Spirits are organisms with only destructive intentions should be regarded as propaganda from DEM. From the very beginning, we’ve only been dancing at the palm of DEM’ s hand.)

Ryouko remembered what Origami had said to her two days ago. In her mind, there was a deep conflict between emotion and reason.

That was natural after all. Ryouko and the rest of AST had been fighting Spirits for both the sake of humanity and the world. Even if they suffered numerous injuries and exposed their lives to danger, they had lived with that pride up until now. It wasn’t easy to reject that history so far.

However, in the present situation, the longstanding accumulations of suspicion towards DEM had pushed away the fear simmering in Ryouko’s chest.

“————Tch.”

Bang!

Ryouko crashed her laser gun against her forehead. Looking at their captain's startling behavior, the AST members curled their eyebrows in surprise.

".....You guys."

In terms of time, it was at most ten seconds. But during that time, Ryouko condensed everything in her life in her thoughts. Then at last, Ryouko opened her mouth.

".....Prepare for re-employment, until then, do whatever you want."

".....!"

The AST members returned that order with both confusion and surprise——
But overshadowing even that, there was a rising sense of excitement.



"Fu——"

While equipped with both her limited Astral Dress and <Ratatoskr> CR-Unit <Brynhildr>, Origami let out a light breath. Then at the same time, the visual support surrounding her eyes captured the location of all of the surrounding enemies.

Then, in line with that action, several feathers floating around Origami shuffled into the sky at a speed unmatched by the naked eye as they began to emit light from their tips.

The Angel of Light, <Metatron>, all of the <Bandersnatch> who had received that blow all had their heads uniformly punctured and fell into the ground.

However, no matter how many were defeated, no matter how many <Bandersnatch> units were slaughtered, the next wave would flock in succession. Although a single unit was not a big deal, this level of quantity was still a threat.

“——Tch, no matter how many are knocked down, it’s still endless.”

Accompanying that voice, a girl with a black CR-Unit flew behind Origami. Like Origami, Mana was also in charge of annihilating the <Bandersnatch> position at the rear.

“Sure enough, we have to sever off the source.”

“I understand.”

As Origami replied back with a small nod, there was another voice coming from behind.

“——Origami-san! Mana-san!”

“Mun, we’ve kept you waiting.”

After saying that, Yoshino, who was riding the ice angel <Zadkiel> and Mukuro, who was holding the key angel <Michael>, had both arrived.

“You’re late; I was worried that something had happened.”

“S-sorry……”

As Mana lashed out in a sharp glint in her eyes, Yoshino lowered her head in apology.

“We were delayed for a brief moment by your old friends.”

After Mukuro had refuted, Mana, having likely been aware of what happened, scratched her face lightly.

“Ah……I see. Are they really still coming?”

After saying that, Mana secretly glanced over to Origami.

Origami closed her eyes for a short moment, and then took in a deep breath before replying.

“——Anyway, the team is now complete. We’ll shift to the strategy.”

Yes, in order to increase the success rate for the operation, Origami had gathered together a team.

Origami, Mana, Yoshino, and Mukuro had all gathered together as the team for capturing Artemisia.

The team’s goal was to neutralize Artemisia as soon as possible and escort her to <Fraxinus>. From there, they would use her brainwave data to stop the movements of the <Bandersnatch>.

Onboard Fraxinus, Kotori was overseeing the war situation, alongside with Nia who providing analysis support.

On the side, Miku with <Gabriel> and Natsumi mimicking with <Haniel> was enhancing everyone’s abilities with a performance from their angels. As for the task force to deal with the <Nibelcol> it was Tohka, the Yamai sister, and——

“——Origami-san!”

At that instant, Mana’s voice echoed in her eardrums.

“.....!”

Responded to that voice, Origami reflexively raised her hands.

The next moment, a tremendous force was pressed against Origami’s spear <Einherjar>.

From the sky, a Wizard had flown at an ultra-high speed while gesturing a slashing movement with a laser blade.

Heavy pressure was transmitted to her arm. A voluntary Territory area knitted with dense magic was felt directly against her dry skin. At that overwhelming speed, even Origami wouldn’t have been able to react if she hadn’t heard that voice just now.

Even in DEM, there should be few Wizards whom possessed such power.
Second Executive Manager Ellen Mathers and——

“Artemisia.....!”

Origami called out the name of the Wizard that had just released that sword swing——Artemisia Ashcroft took a few steps back from Origami by using her body to ride the momentum of Origami’s counterattack.

“——Ya, long time no see. Did we meet in space last time?”

Artemisia spoke out as if she had just run into a friend by coincidence. Origami kept <Einherjar> up at a safe distance. While Mana, Yoshino, and Mukuro were surprised by the unexpected arrival of their goal, they also assumed fighting stances as well.

However, even though Artemisia was surrounded by four people, the casualness of her tone did not diminish as she continued speaking.

“Tobiichi Origami——I’ve looked into you a bit, but I don’t remember. I don’t know why, but it’s an itchy feeling. Perhaps we’ve meet somewhere else before?”

After saying that, Artemisia slanted her head in a cute gesture. Origami responded back while keeping her in within the range of sight.

“.....You were given a memory treatment by DEM. If you come with us, we can probably cure you.”

“——Eh?”

As Origami spoke out without hiding any details, Artemisia widened her eyes unexpectedly.

“Uh.....so you’re saying that Westcott-san and Ellen have been deceiving me?”

“Yes.”

“Un.....”

As Origami gave a short reply, Artemisia sighed after several seconds of thinking.

“Sorry, I don’t believe it. ——Because you are all Spirits.”

As soon as she finished, Artemisia’s figure swelled.

With the Territory ejected by her body, there was no need for any preliminary actions.

“.....”

Origami instantly raised her laser spear. Heavy impact, as the laser blades of light knitted from dense magical power clashed with each other, phantasmal sparks lit up scattered into the sky.

However, Origami was neither surprised nor disappointed. She did not think that someone who had their memories adjusted would believe this story.

Besides, this formation was already assembled in anticipation for conflict. Nevertheless, it was the fate of the battlefield to develop beyond the expected results. Just as Artemisia led the assault, the DEM wizards and <Bandersnatch> behind her counterattacked, Mana, Yoshino, and Mukuro, whom were aiming for Artemisia.

“Tch ——!”

“Yoshinon.....!”

“Alirght! Naughty kids are going to be frozen!”

“Mun.....!”

The three of them spread out, while avoiding the bombardment and missiles that poured out like rain, they continued to shoot down the enemies.

Origami raised her brow as she operated <Metatron> to dance in the air and attack Artemisia from all directions. However, Artemisia condensed the Voluntary Territory surrounding her body, deflecting back the direction of the ray beams to escape the attack.

Even the slightest mistake in the angle and strength of the Voluntary Territory could have resulted in serious injury; Artemisia's finesse was truly superb. While mentally praising her skill, Origami enhanced her spear <Einherjar> with the ambient magical and spiritual power in the atmosphere at an alarming rate.

"Ha——!"

"Waah."

After Artemisia accurately avoided the fast-paced thrust, she aimed to kick her legs in gap opening.

Origami blocked this maneuver by pushing up with the soles of her feet. However, at that instant, having seemingly anticipated this, Artemisia aimed to lift her sword upward.

Somehow, Origami was able to parry the second blow with her laser spear.

"——"

It was a strange feeling of lightness.

At the next moment, Artemisia made a fierce dash forward, letting go of her grip holding the hilt of her sword as she tried to pierce through Origami's voluntary Territory.

"Hyaa——"

"Ku.....!"

It was too late for her body to react in time. Origami guided <Metatron> to fire off a ray towards herself.

The light struck Origami's shoulders a little faster than Origami's attacking. Having already lost her balance from the clash of Territories against each other, Artemisia's strike left a glancing blow on Origami's cheek.

"Ha!"

In retaliation, Origami kicked Artemisia in the abdomen, recreating the distance between the two of them.

As Artemisia flew backwards from that momentum, she expanded the scope of her voluntary Territory again pulled back the laser sword she had tossed into the air.

"As expected of you, that was an admirable counter just now."

"....."

Origami's facial expression slightly distorted upon hearing Artemisia's unwarranted praise.

——Sure enough, she was monstrously strong.

Trying capture the objective alive would be much more difficult than killing. It would tremendously arduous for Origami to secure Artemisia alone.

While trying to force this stalemate to last longer, there was no other choice but to wait until Mana, Yoshino, and Mukuro have shaken off their enemies. One second. Having one second would be enough if she could only distract Artemisia for that long——

"——Oririn!"

As Origami was pondering such thoughts, Nia's voice onboard <Fraxinus> was suddenly heard through the communicator device.

"This may be bad news. But there seems to be a strong reaction rapidly approaching Oririn and the others' location. It is likely.....Ellen."

"....."

Origami held her breath as that desperate news shook in her eardrums.

Five Ratatoskr airships were deployed above the skies of Tenguu City.

Onboard one of them, <Ulmus> the sister ship of <Fraxinus>, the chairmen of the Round Table, Elliot Woodmen was watching the monitor screen.

“So you came——Ellen. It’s a good decision, you’ve grown up.”

Then, while looking at the response from the radar, he let out a sigh.

Yes, the response from Ellen indicated that she was heading to the direction where Artemisia was fighting Origami and the other Spirits.

Did they sniff out that location as being prevalent, or was a part of a larger strategy? Either way, the situation was quite dire.

The enemy was the former SSS ace Artemisia Ashcroft in addition to several <Bandersnatch> units and <Nibelcol>.

On a battlefield that was barely at a stalemate, introducing the poisonous drug known as Ellen would surely lead to the death of the Spirits.

Even so, what can be done here is really limited. Airships were also in the midst of battle. It was impossible for the Ratatoskr party, which was originally at a disadvantage, to send reinforcements. Even if there were more personnel, there was nobody in <Ratatoskr> who could stop Ellen. ——No, in this world there was no existence possible of that.

——However, there was one sole exception.

“Karen.”

“

As Woodman called out her name, Karen, who was position next to him, shook her shoulders slightly.

“I have a request for you.”

“.....Yes.”

After an eerie silence, Karen replied back in a taciturn tone.

Although that was to be expected.

She, along with the rest of the crew, already knew what Woodman was intending to do.

Karen quietly breathed, turning behind Woodman to operate his wheelchair before calling out to him in a soft voice.

“Elliot, can I tell you a joke to ease the scene?”

“Oh, from you? This is rare. Please allow me to listen.”

As Woodman motioned on, Karen continued her words in a gentle tone.

“——Let’s run away Elliot. The Spirits, <Ratatoskr>, let’s discard everything and buy a quiet home by the countryside and live out in peace. In the mountains——a place with a flower field would be nice.”

“.....”

“It’ll be best to have no more than three children. I don’t care about gender. Whether it’s a boy or girl, as long as it is with you and our children, it will be wonderful. Then, across the bustling days and even the noisy days, let’s accumulate a small happiness and grow old together. And then, one day, when you’re called to heaven——hopefully, it will be on my lap.”

“.....Karen.”

Woodman quietly said as he placed her hand on top of his own resting on the wheelchair.

When listening carefully, one can still hear the voice of crew sobbing from the lower part of the bridge.

However, Karen herself continued to speak without changing her facial expression.

“It’s okay to laugh, it was just said out in jest.”

“Ah.....you have the talent of a comedy actress.”

“Karen.”

“Yes.”

“Sorry.”

“That sort of thing is the reason that I fell in love with you.”

“.....Haha.”

Woodman let out a small laugh, and then he took out the golden dog tag shining at the bosom of his hands—the emergency outfit device.

“Who are you fighting Artemisia——Tobiichi Origami. Hmm, that’s fine. I’ll have to return that injury someday.”

Ellen, who was equipped with the platinum CR-Unit <Pendragon>, proceeded ahead at a high speed through the extremely chaotic sky.

Although a vast amount of sparks scattered and explosions detonated around her surroundings, Ellen’s main objective right now was the head of Itsuka Shido.

Ellen increased the thrusters of her propeller as random attacks from either allies or enemies continued to bounce off against her voluntary Territory.

Nevertheless, Ellen understood that her objective likely laid on <Ratatoskr>’s side. No doubt that Shidou was being protected by one of their aerial warships.

In that case, the next priority was the Spirits. There were three groups of Spirits currently identified in the air.

One group was <Diva> and <Witch> in front of <Fraxinus>.

The other was <Princess> and <Berserk> who was proceeding into a dense area of <Nibelcol>.

And finally, the last group was <Angel>, <Hermit>, and <Zodiac> confronting Artemisia, alongside the renegade Takamiya Mana.

Ellen had chosen the last one for a simple reason.

After all, there were too many enemies. When comparing the <Nibelcol> and Artemisia, Ellen judged that there would be less stress from being supported by the latter.

“It’s convenient that Mana is there as well. I can kill two birds with——”

——Then.

Ellen’s words suddenly came to a screeching halt. She slammed on the brakes as an attack struck her while moving at supersonic speed. If it were not for the Voluntary Territory protecting her, her body fragmented into pieces.

Then, at the next moment, a shining blade laced with magical energy swept in front of Ellen’s eyes.

“Wha——”

Ellen opened her eyes in alarm while gripping <Caledfwlch> in her hands. The person who had taken the initiative to perform an ambush on Ellen stood upright while slowly turned around to block Ellen’s path.

“——Who are you.”

Ellen’s expression stained with an attentive color as she pointed the edge of her sword at this person.

There was no spiritual response. It was a Wizard. However, Origami and Mana should still be with Artemisia. She did not imagine that there was another Wizard in <Ratatoskr> that could make a spectacular surprise attack on herself.

“.....”

The Wizard, with a lance-like unit in hand, slowly turned his shoulders around. As a result, the features that were once difficult to distinguish in the shade gradually became more visible in the light.

“.....What——!?”

Staring at the figure, Ellen held her breath.

He was a young man with bright blond hair reminiscent of sunlight.

The CR-unit he was wearing was also in a golden shade. The magical power rising from his entire body was openly displaying the extraordinary strength in the Territory surrounding him.

However, for Ellen, that sort of thing didn't matter at all.

“Ah....., ah———”

Those self-confident eyes, the shape of his eyebrows, that fearless look——

Everything had struck in Ellen's heart, her memory.

The man lifted his chin in an exaggerated motion as he finally spoke out.

“——Hey, long time no see, Ellen.

Did you enjoy boasting being the strongest Wizard in the world without me around?”

——Thump.

Ellen's heart rate spiked.

The whirling emotions in her body finally manifested out to the outside world through her throat.

".....Elioooooooooot—————"

That's right. Elliot. Elliot ·Baldwin · Woodman.

In the past, together with Ellen and Westcott, they were comrades who had created DEM and vowed the change the world——and at the same time, the same unforgivable person who reneged on his promise.

The man standing in front of Ellen now was in his heyday appearance.

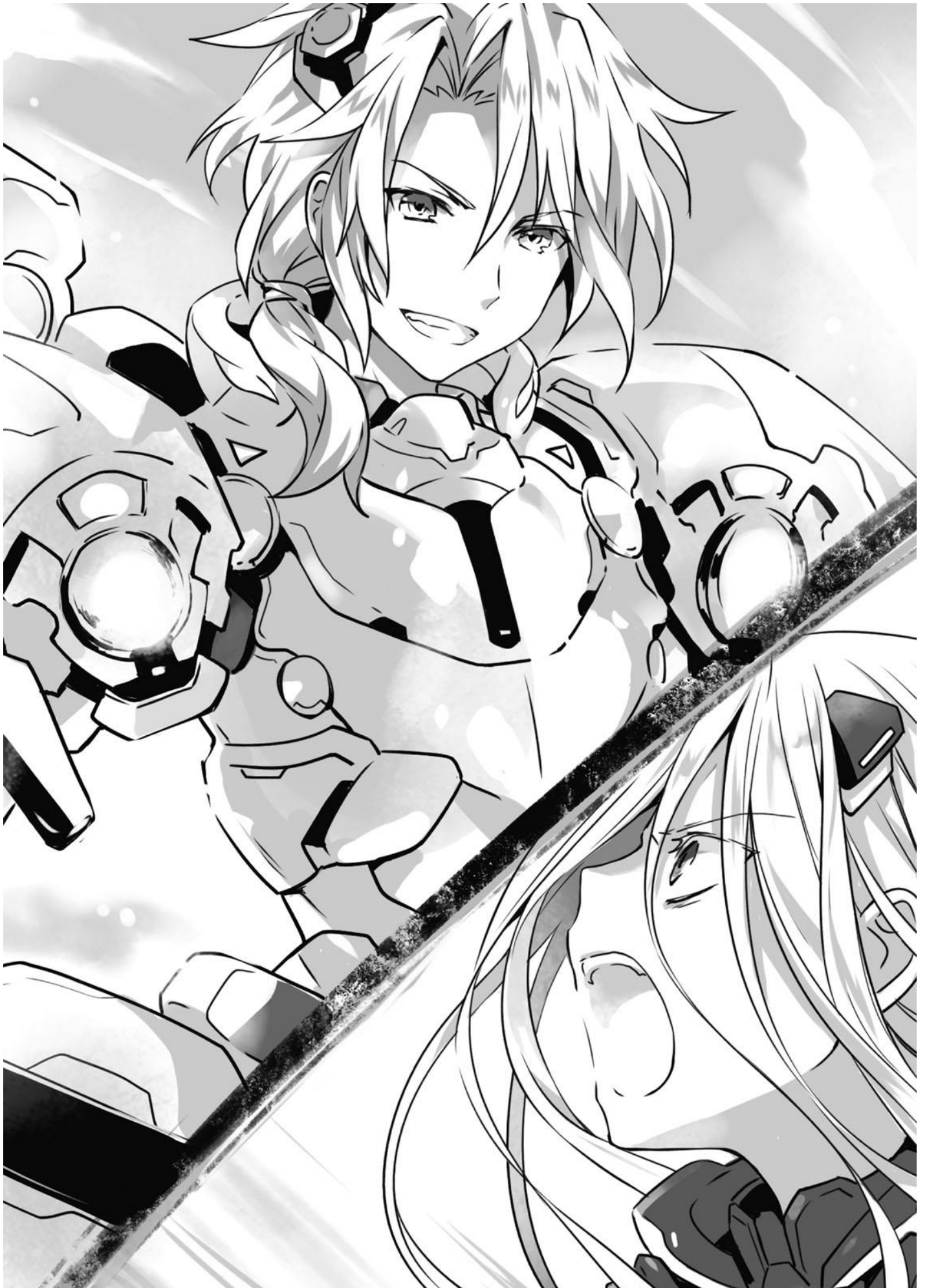
"You're as young as ever. ——Well, it's not like I have the right to say that now."

"Ahhhhhhhhh———!"

Ellen screamed in fury at the attack on her dignity, raising up <Caledfwlch> to leap towards Elliot.

In that voice, there was resentment, hatred, and fury——

And even a small amount of delight that the person herself was not aware of.





“Ah～ah, how boring.”

“Hey, the other “me” is fighting with <Nightmare>. I also want to do some more flashy work.”

“Really, really, this must be Ellen’s crafty plot. She defrauded Otou-sama and made him snub me.”

“Yes, it is all Ellen’s fault.”

While chatting amongst each other, the <Nibelcol> team had landed on the ground.

Their objective was to destroy the magical cannons surrounding Tenguu City.

From the vision casted from their eyes, they could see a continuous bombardment of artillery fired from the rooftops of multi-tenant buildings and private houses. It felt like an extremely surreal sight. The long chimney from the public bathhouse transforming into an anti-aircraft gun looked like something from a gag strip.

Nonetheless, it could not be left unattended due to merely being interesting to look at. The airships were still in good condition due to the constant Voluntary Territory protecting the hull. However, something on the level of the <Bandersnatch> would easily be blown to pieces from the artillery deployment.

Although the mechanical dolls were easily to supplement, they were neither inexhaustible nor costless. It was naturally better to avoid potential losses if possible.

However, since the turrets were also protected by the Voluntary Territory, any attacks from above would only destroy the surrounding streets. Therefore, a group of <Nibelcol>, known for their leadership and strength in numbers, was given the responsibility of destroying the forts.

“Un, don’t say that. This is for Otou-sama.”

“Let’s hurry and finish this up so we can go out and play.”

“Alright～.”

“Hey, who do you want to play with?”

“Well——the source of my power came from <Sister>. If she was used as my template, then surely she must be a stunning beauty.”

“That’s right. She must be a virtuous woman with an impeccable figure, a flawless superwoman.”

Like a group of female high school students, the <Nibelcol> continued chatting endlessly.

Immediately afterwards, a “gagagagaga!” sound was let out from a hail of magazine magical bullets raining down on the group of <Nibelcol>.

“Kya!”

“It hurts～!”

Screams filled with no tension were uttered as the heads of several <Nibelcol> ricocheted off their bodies.

The rest of the <Nibelcol> look around to find several Wizards belonging to <Ratatoskr> guarding the turrets. Apparently, they were the ones who had ambushed the <Nibelcol>.

“How very incompetent!”

“I’ll never forgive you!”

The struck down <Nibelcol> let out a cry as their heads and other wounds regenerated in an instant.

“Wha.....!?”

Frightened by what had just occurred, the Wizards continued firing more rounds as their faces grew paler.

“Humph——”

Although having one or two bodies killed wasn't too much of a hassle, the pain still meant it hurt. The <Nibelcol> all raised their hands at once.

“<Beelzebub ·Page >”

The <Nibelcol> chanted in unison as they called out that name.

Then, corresponding to the command of the voice, the paper in the <Nibelcol>'s hands danced into the air, forming a protective barrier to protect them from the shower of magical bullets.

“What.....!”

The voices of the Wizards echoed in disarray.

However, that was not the end. A few of the remaining papers automatically folded themselves into paper airplanes, flying towards the Wizards at a bullet-like speed.

“Uga.....!”

“Gu——”

The paper airplanes passed through the voluntary Territories of the Wizards with ease, passing though their shoulders or feet before draw a trajectory back into the <Nibelcol>'s hands like a boomerang.

“Ahahaha! How fragile!”

“Isn't <Ratatoskr> supposed to be a companion of the Spirits? I can also be considered a Spirit though.”

“Ah, so then there should be no qualms for retribution then.”

“I see, ahahaha.”

The <Nibelcol> let out a light laugh before raising her hand again, directing the paper airplane towards the Wizards.

“Ku.....”

“Goodbye.”

However, the next moment, just as the <Nibelcol> were about to release the page, a fierce gust of wind blew from behind, blowing away the pages of <Beelzebub ·Page >.”

“Kya!”

“W-what is this?”

The <Nibelcol> pressed down against their skirt and hair as they turned to look behind.

Immediately afterwards, a young girl equipped in a limited Astral Dress and a huge sword rushed over to attack the <Nibelcol>——It was the Spirit, Tohka.

“Hahhhhhhh!”

“Kya!”

At that moment, the group of <Nibelcol> scattered in two groups in order to avoid the blow. Then, from behind Tohka, the Yamai sisters, armored with limited Astral Dresses that had wings on their left and right shoulders respectively, spoke out to the Wizards guarding the ground turrets.

“Please leave this to us.”

“Retreat. Please head back.”

“.....! S-sorry.....!”

The Wizards left the scene while pressing down on their shoulders, which had been pierced by <Beelzebub · Yelet>. While quickly confirming this with a glance, Kaguya and Yuzuru lined up beside Tohka, who was glaring intently at the <Nibelcol>.

Three Spirits. While looking at this scene, the <Nibelcol> widened their eyes in surprise before distorting their lips in a maniacal grin.

“Kyahaha, is this serious?”

“<Princess> and <Berserk>? The fighting fraction has assembled together.”

“I thought it would be boring destroying this fort. You’ve really been considerate for us.”

After they had finished talking, the <Nibelcol> raised their hands to call back the pages of <Beelzebub · Yelet> that blew into the wind. The paper airplanes unfolded back into sheets of paper before quickly assuming another shape.

——Paper cranes. A string of a thousand paper cranes lined up together just like a flock of birds.

“Fufu, you’ll be at a lost if you think you can blow this away with your wind again.”

“If you’re careless, your body will turn into a honeycomb of holes.”

“Now, do you think you’ll be able to sever my head before then?”

“But, I don’t think there is any point doing that.”

“I am one of a whole, a whole composed of one.”

“No matter how many you kill. As long as <Beelzebub> is here, I will never die.”

“Kyahaha, how can you kill a woman that does not know death?”

The <Nibelcol> smiled calmly while standing before the array of paper cranes. However, while Tohka and the Yamai Sisters were staring intently at the <Nibelcol>, they did not proceed to launch forward with any attacks.

“.....?”

At first, it looked like they were looking for an opportunity to kill the <Nibelcol>——but that wasn’t right. There was nothing in their eyes that resembled confusion or bafflement.

Calm——but lurking with powerful intent. That is what was spoken in their eyes.

“<Nibelcol>, sorry to say, but your opponent is not us.”

“Kaka, that is the case, there is a more suitable opponent for you.”

“Consent. Yuzuru and the others are merely the escort.”

“.....Ha?”

All of the <Nibelcol> curled their brows upwards in surprise.

The Spirits should be at the top of the fighting force that <Ratatoskr> possessed. If there was anything capable of replacing them, then it could only be the former Adeptus 2——someone on the level of Takamiya Mana. However, suppose even if that Wizard had appeared, the situation would not change drastically. After all, no matter how many number of <Nibelcol> are killed——

“.....Eh?”

Halfway through that thought the <Nibelcol> let out an unexpected stunned voice.

It was because they saw, coming from behind Tohka and the others, the face of a person walking through the sand and dust.

——That is, it was the face of a single boy.

Of a medium build and neutral face, he was wearing neither an limited Astral Dress nor CR-unit.

It was just a boy of high school age.

“Itsuka.....Shidou?”

With eyes widened with alarm, that name was uttered out from their mouths. Yes, the person, walking through the cityscape transformed in a mountain of rubble by the aerial bombardment, was the exact person the <Nibelcol> had sought out to kill, Itsuka Shidou.

If Westcott had died, then it was DEM’s defeat.

If Itsuka Shidou died, then it was <Ratatoskr>’s defeat.

Although it was not a written rule, both sides should have been well aware of that fact.

Therefore, the <Nibelcol> also thought that Shidou was hiding behind a sturdy airship. At the very least, appearing in the forefront of the battlefield

unguarded was something that had never expected. The sudden surprise led the <Nibelcol> to remain frozen for a while.

However, such a gap only lasted for a brief second. The <Nibelcol> turned their expressions of surprise into a fearless smile, glaring at Shidou who approaching their side.

“Well.....although I don’t know what you are planning to do, how very bold of you.”

“You’re my opponent? Ahaha, are you underestimating me?”

“Well, no matter what, this would make a good souvenir for Otou-sama——yes!”

The <Nibelcol> lifted their hands and fired the <Beelzebub · Page> that had transformed into paper cranes.

“Fu——!”

Tohka and the Yamai Sisters leaped forward to protect Shidou from the scattered paper cranes.

However, that behavior was within the scope of expectations.

The strength of the <Nibelcol> did not lie in an absolute individual power, but rather a quantity of power that pushed everything else away. The <Nibelcol> took around 30 copies to deal with the Spirits, while the rest headed straight towards Shidou.

“Hahahahahahaha——!”

While laughing loudly, a single <Nibelcol> was rapidly approaching towards Shidou.

Tohka and the others were too far behind. Even for a Spirit, they wouldn’t be able to catch up at this timing.

The <Nibelcol> extended her hand forward in order to pierce through Shidou's heart.

However——

"<Nibelcol>."

At that instant, Shidou, who had remained silent up until now, unexpectedly let out a gentle voice.

"——I love you."

".....,Ha?"

Hearing words that were too unexpected, the <Nibelcol> widened her eyes in alarm for an instant.

However, that was only a mere to prelude to Shidou's bizarre actions. Seizing the momentary gap, Shidou placed her hands over the <Nibelcol>'s head——

"——"

And then, he pulled the <Nibelcol> forward, pressing his own lips onto the <Nibelcol>'s lips.

".....!?"

The sudden action filled the <Nibelcol>'s mind with a myriad of questions. The meaning was completely incomprehensible. Did he lose his judgement because death was approaching? However, there wasn't any hesitation from his part. Then why did he appear on the battlefield to do this? Is this the enemy's secret strategy? Impossible. For the <Nibelcol> who would never die, such a thing would never——

"Uh.....huh.....?"

The <Nibelcol> felt a sense of discomfort. As if suffering from an illusion of her body melting. Her posture could no longer be remained. Face struck like a fever. Burning. Heart. Melting. However, there was also the feeling of not knowing why it felt so great——

——With a faint light, the <Nibelcol> disappeared like a bubble as a piece of paper fluttered to the ground.

The moment the paper reached the ground, it faded away into light particles in the air.

“Ha.....!?”

“What——this is.....!”

Individuals who were watching this sight from the side spoke out with a trembling voice.

Immediately afterwards, even these individuals felt that their heart was beating at an abnormal rate. It was as if she was attacked by the euphoria of a drug-like sensation secreted into her brain. Then just like the previous individual, they all disappeared into light particles in a fit of ecstasy.



“K-kiss!? The <Nibelcol>.....?”

Just before the beginning of <Ratatoskr> and DEM’s battle.

Onboard the bridge of <Fraxinus>, after being told of Maria’s method to deal with the <Nibelcol>, Shidou let out a startled expression.

No, not just Shidou. The surrounding Spirits and crew members all made a response similar to Shidou’s.

However, Maria continued to speak in a very calm tone, as the screen continued to flicker.

“Yes, through a kiss. —Although a pseudo-one, the <Nibelcol> is still a Spirit. Indeed it is reiryoku and not magical power that is being observed from them. As a result, it should be possible to seal them through Shidou’s power.”

“W-wait a minute. Even if the situation is just as Maria said, there needs to a positive likeability to establish a seal on the Spirits. If the other party is not in a state where they had opened their heart, then no matter how many kisses.....”

Shidou spoke out with sweat dripped down his face.

Yes, that was a point that he had been told by Kotori and Reine multiple times up until now. Even if there was an opening to kiss the <Nibelcol>, the opponent is a Spirit created by DEM and aimed at Shidou’s life with clear murderous intent. Shidou did not think that sealing the spiritual power was possible.

Having said that, leisurely chatting in order to raise the goodwill of the <Nibelcol> was also not an option. Maria’s proposal could only be described as empty talk.

However, Maria, who seemed to think that Shidou’s response was rationale, let out a sigh (or at least a sound resembling that) before continuing on.

“——It is true, just as you said. However, that is only the case for ordinary Spirits.”

“W-what do you mean.....?”

“Please recall the source of the <Nibelcol>, from where they are created from.”

“From where.....”

As Shidou said that, he turned his attention to Nia. Similarly, the other Spirits followed suit. Having suddenly been showered with unexpected attention, Nia lowered her back with an “uffun” sound. However, no one respond to this. The <Nibelcol> is a Spirit created from the power of <Beelzebub>. And the Demon King <Beelzebub> was originally the book angel <Rasiel> held by Nia.

“Yes, the origin of the <Nibelcol> is <Beelzebub>, but the Sephira Crystal is not the only thing taken from Nia.”

“That means.....”

Kotori raised her brow after thinking of something, to which Maria quickly interjected with a “yes”.

“Nia. What do you think about Shidou?”

“Eh? If it can help prepare a seal, then I can raise it for him at any time.”

As Nia replied back rather gloomily, Maria let out a cough of dissatisfaction before continuing on.

“Wait a minute. Are you saying that whether or not the <Nibelcol> can be sealed is linked to Nia’s positive favorability.....?!”

“That is likely the case. ——To use common jargon, even if the mouth of that low-degree woman is skeptical, at least the body is a little bit more honest in its place.”

“.....”

For that to be deemed common jargon, Shidou wiped the away the sweat on his forehead.

That being said, if Maria’s theory is true, they should be able to neutralize the difficult enemy, the <Nibelcol>. <Bandersnatch> and <Nibelcol>. If those two, who comprised of the enemy’s main battle force, disappear, there was a chance for victory for <Ratatoskr>, who was heavily outnumbered.

But just then, Kotori gently shook her head.

“Even if that is true, it is too dangerous. Since kissing the <Nibelcol> is the requirement, then that would mean, Shidou, who is being targeted, has to appear on the battlefield.”

“Muu——”

Tohka and the others, who had realized the meaning of Kotori’s words, all made a difficult expression.

Indeed, if thought of in terms of common sense, it was an absolutely impossible strategy. After all, it meant sending someone who should remain hidden away directly onto the forefront of the battlefield.

“.....”

——However, Shidou was not at a loss.

As he said so, Shidou stared at everyone with a determined look.

“Let’s do it. If this is the only way. Rather.....it would be better to say that this method fits our style the most.”



——At the same time the sensation of the kiss faded away, the girl held within his arms disappeared into particles of light.

“.....”

From that mysterious feeling, Shidou remained at that spot for a moment. No, it wasn’t just that.

Having seen the kiss between Shidou and the <Nibelcol>, the surrounding <Nibelcol> flushed their faces with a red blush, twisting their bodies while clutching their chests before immediately disappearing as well.

The possibility of this phenomenon had been suggested by Maria in advance. The <Nibelcol> are one part of many, many composed of one.

Therefore, the same effect may be seen in kissed individuals and individuals who were aware of being kissed.

A fatal hole in the complete group, the undead army, the <Nibelcol>.

Having the vulnerable Shidou on to the battlefield is, on the contrary, the only blade that could destroy the strongest army——!

“Shall we get started <Nibelcol>, it’s time for me and you to begin our date (war).”

Shidou declared in a quiet but evocative tone. Then, as if to provoke the <Nibelcol> further, he extended his fingers forward.

“.....!”

“Don’t underestimate——”

“We have——!”

The <Nibelcol> who had escaped from the seal flushed their expressions with anger as they all leaped forward to attack Shidou.

“Ha!”

Shidou injected the reiryoku of <Gabriel> into his voice, accompanied by that imposing shout; his power was instilled with power.

Although the seal could still be done, the opponent was still a Spirit. Basic physical ability was as much of a difference as the distance between heaven and earth. The power of an Angel was indispensable in trying to catch the speedy movements of the <Nibelcol>.

“Ahahahahaha!”

“Go to hell——!”

The <Nibelcol> yelled as they attacked Shidou from all directions.

The <Nibelcol> seemed to be anxious about this unexpected situation, but their response was still come. Certainly, there was only one pair of lips that Shidou had, it would be impossible for him to respond when pressed from so many directions at once.

However.

“——<Zadkiel>! <Haniel>!”

As Shidou called out those names, the moisture in the air condensed to form three icy pillars behind him.

Then, at the next moment, Shidou used the power of <Haniel> to give those icy pillars the same appearance as himself.

“Wha.....!?”

Faced against this surprise, the <Nibelcol> approaching Shidou hesitated. From a time perspective, it was less than a second.

However, that was ample time for Shidou, who had already strengthened his physically abilities and reflexes through <Gabriel>.

“——Un——”

“.....!?”

Shidou seized an approaching <Nibelcol> and subsequently snatched her lips.

“Ha.....this is.....”

Then, individuals who had witnessed that scene, faded into light particle along with the one that was kissed.

“Wha...What, you guys——!”

The <Nibelcol> who had survived because of the distance in their formation let out a roar.

This time, they did rush towards Shidou. Quickly raising their hands, the pages of the book floating around rolled up into a conical shape, pointing its tips towards Shidou’s direction.

Indeed, if being sealed required a kiss, then they could just attack at a safe distance. Although simple, it was an efficient strategy.

“But——”

——If they would disappear because of recognition, then perhaps.

Bringing his right hand towards his lips, he made a playful gesture forward extending out his hand towards the <Nibelcol> group about to release the cone.

“Uh.....tch!”

That’s right, it was just like——a flying kiss.

Or in layman terms, it was a blown kiss.

“Ugu.....!”

“Ha——!?”

Having received the thrown kiss from Shidou, the <Nibelcol> all blushed madly while pressing their hands against their cheeks.



“——<Raphael>!”

Using the wind to see a chance opportunity, Shidou quickly approached a nearby <Nibelcol> and stole her lips.

“Ahh.....”

“Umm.....”

Leaving out an intoxicated voice, the surrounding <Nibelcol> also disappeared. Remaining in the distance, the <Nibelcol> let out a frightened “Hii” sound.

“Now then.....who is next?”

“Kya...ahhhhh!”

“Otou-sama——!”

Letting out a scream, the remaining <Nibelcol> fled for safety.

However, even if they looked like a weak girl now, they were still a threat to other Wizards and Spirits. Although he felt slightly guilty for bullying them, Shidou used <Raphael>’s wind to catch up.

“I won’t let you escape——kitten-chan.”

——Then the tempest of love was unleashed.

Whether it was the fleeing <Nibelcol> or the attacking <Nibelcol>, both groups were trembling as they were either trying to hide in the ruins or strike down their target.

Shidou made no distinction between them. He whispered to them sweet words of love before gently sweeping their lips away.

That attitude was matchless against those Spirits.

Although <Bandersnatch> and other Wizards were trying to rush down from the sky after noticing this anomaly, there was no one who could break set up by Tohka and the Yamai sisters, who were in charge of protecting Shidou. Soon after, most of the <Nibelcol> sent to the ground to destroy the fortifications had already disappeared.

“Fu——”

However, there were still many <Nibelcol> on the ground. With the next battlefield as the goal, Shidou marched forward to a dense area populated by <Nibelcol> on the other side.

However——

“Shidou!”

Tohka’s voice suddenly resounded from the sky.

At that moment, Shidou felt the presence of someone lurking behind him.

“Ku.....!”

——Was he being lured by the <Nibelcol> to suffer an ambush.....!?”

Thinking for a moment, there was only an instant of regret. Shidou stretched his hand to protect his back.

Even if a blow landed, he could still recover from the regenerative power of <Camael> as long as it wasn’t an instant death. Then, Shidou would have to steal her lips even if it meant gambling his life.

——However.

“Eh?”

“.....”

The moment Shidou turned around, his eyes widened as he stopped moving.

The reason was simple. What Shidou had assumed to be a <Nibelcol> was actually the shadow of——

“.....Ara, ara. How bold of you, Shidou-san.”

With two eyes of dissimilar color, the girl had a charming smile on his face.

Chapter 5: The Rebirth of the Spirit

“Ha....., ha.....”

Hiding in a deserted alley, the boy fiercely swirled his shoulders up and down. Large beads of sweat exuded down from his forehead as he pressed against his bleeding arm. The boy gritted with the back of his teeth to endure the pain while slowly squatting his body against the wall.

“I-it’s nothing to worry about, Mio.....”

“Un.....compared to that, show me your arm.”

As the boy was asked, Mio, who was also running away into the alley behind him, placed her hand over the boy’s arm with a calm expression.

Then, as the part wrapped in her hand began to emit a faint glow, the pain felt by the boy’s arm slowly disappeared.

“Wow.....that is amazing.”

“I just blocked the wound with reiryoku. ——From that.”

While speaking, Mio glanced quickly towards the direction of the street. From there came a steady stream of footsteps and voice searching for the boy and others.

“.....Ah. Who are those people?”

The boy whispered while staring at the silhouette flashing through the slit in the building.

That right. Right now the boy and Mio were being perused by an enigmatic group.

The reasons for the pursuit and their true identity were not clear. However, while the boy and Mio were going shopping like usual, foreigners suddenly appeared and began to attack them. It was just like a cheap scene from an action movie.

“.....”

Mio closed her lips, remaining silent. The boy slanted his head in curiosity.

“Un? What’s wrong, Mio.”

“.....Probably, they are chasing after me.”

“Huh?”

“Inside, there were some people I had the impression of having seen already. We’ve talked about this before, the people I remember seeing first.”

Mio creased her eyebrows as she painfully continued.

“.....I’m sorry. You got involved because of me. ——Run away, after that I’ll.....”

“I don’t want that!”

The boy interrupted Mio’s words as she quickly sprang back up.

“Eh——”

“From the every moment, I talked to the girl at the center of that explosion; I was already prepared for trouble. And——”

The boy pulled up Mio’s hands in order to prevent her from seeing his flustered face while he was speaking.

“We are.....family.”

“.....!”

Mio’s hands trembled a bit from being surprised. Afterwards, she tightly gripped back on the boy’s hands.

There was no need for words. This was the best answer. The boy gave a slight nod, pulling on Mio’s hand as they began walking.

“——Anyway, let’s first head to the police. We’ll say that were being chased by dangerous people and need protection. Don’t look down on the rule of law for this country.....”

However, at that moment, the boy suddenly stopped his feet dead in his tracks. The reason was simple. Just as they were leaving the alley, they ran into a man while walking.

Bright blond hair and a lean face, it was a westerner who was dressed in black clothes. Without a doubt, he was part of the group chasing the boy earlier.

“.....! Get down!”

Mio stepped forward as if to cover the boy.

“Mio!”

“It will be fine, I won’t kill him.....!”

After saying that, Mio glared at the man.

However, the thick tension did not last very long. ——Since the man took in a heavy sigh while placing his hand against his forehead.

“.....Hey, hey, are serious. You’re the ones who ran into me here!”

Then, the man began to speak in fluent Japanese.

“Huh.....”

The unexpected response left the boy and Mio momentarily stunned. However, the man continued to speak in a calm voice.

“.....Mio, so is that this child’s name?”

“.....Ah, I choose it.”

“That’s a really good name.”

Then, as the man was speaking, he turned his attention to Mio.

“Hey, right now——are you happy?”

“.....At the least, I don’t have any propensity to rejoice when chased by hostile people.”

“N-no, I didn’t mean it like that.Do you want to stay with that boy?”

“

Although Mio stared at the man with some ounce of hesitation, she gave him a swift but small nod.

“So that’s it.”

Then while the man let out another deep breath, he made a thumb up expression while directing them back to the alley.

“——Go.”

“.....Ha?”

Hearing those unexpected words shocked the boy’s eyes opened. For a moment, he thought it was a trick to cause him to lower his caution. However, he couldn’t detect the slightest degree of hostility coming from that man.

“W-what do you mean?”

“There’s no time for asking that. Hurry up and go ahead. Otherwise——”

“! Found them! Over there!”

The next moment, a large cry was heard coming from the street. Accompanied by intense footsteps, three chasers ran over.

“Aaahh really, didn’t I say so.”

The man then exaggeratingly shrugged his shoulders, placing his head on his forehead as he sharpened his gaze and stomped on the ground.

Then, after slipping past the boy and Mio, he opened of his palm, striking the pursuers directly at the stomach.

“Kaha.....!?”

“Woodman-san, what.....!”

The pursers let out a pained voice as they fell to the ground one by one. The man who was called Woodman scratched his head as if annoyed by the trouble. Then, he pointed his thumb to the alley to urge the boy once again.

“.....Hurry. That child——Mio. I’m leaving it up to you, boy.”

“.....Ah, um.....!”

Whether it was infighting or betrayal——it wasn’t clear what had just happened, but they seemed to be saved. Shortly after, the boy grabbed Mio’s hand and began to run.

However, while he didn’t know how long they ran, he suddenly felt the force exerted by Mio’s hand, which suddenly pulled the boy backwards.

“Waa!?”

The sudden emergency brake caused the boy’s body to sway back from whiplash.

At that moment, “pan!” accompanied by a dry sound, in front of the boy——or rather the location he was just at a moment ago had burst into sparks.

“Wha.....”

The boy furrowed his brow. Following this action, a number of pursers armed with guns appeared from the front alley.

And from the very back of the group—a very prominent man came to the forefront.

It was a tall man who was about 20 years old. He was characterized by dim silver hair and rusty eyes. Although his expression and behavior were very gentle, his body was emitting the strange atmosphere that he couldn't completely hide.

“——Long time no see, Spirit. I've wanted to see you.”

“.....”

Mio let out a sullen expression. However, the man did not take heed towards that and simply redirected his attention to the boy.

"This is our first time meeting, isn't it boy. Thank you so much for protecting our Spirit. I really appreciate it. Of course, we've prepared a corresponding gift in return."

The man let out a light smile while speaking. Hearing these words that resembled as if one was treating a pet, the boy could not help but raise his voice.

“What are you playing at——”

However.

“——We are currently protecting your *sister*. Let's return to each other everything to the correct path.”

“Wha.....!?”

“.....”

Hearing what the man had just said, the boy and Mio both stood breathless for an instant.

“You bastard! If you try to do anything to Mana, I will never forgive you.....!”

“Huh? So that girl is called Mana. Haha, looks like my joke was useful after all. It seems that there was not without reason that the Spirit drifted into your hands.”

While not understanding of anything being wrong, the man openly laughed.

Of course, he may have been lying about abducting Mana. However, his frantic behavior and numerous subordinates likely meant he wasn't kidding.

Having probably guessed the same thing as the boy, Mio stepped forward with a sullen expression.

“.....Promise me that if I go with you, you'll return Mana.”

“Ah, of course.”

“Mio!?”

The boy let out a surprised voice. However, Mio slowly turned around.

“.....It's alright. Originally, I am an existence that shouldn't have appeared here. I can't afford to put Mana in danger because of me. ——Even if it was short, I was happy to be with you.”

“——,”

From the depth of the boy's throat, he let out an inaudible sound. Mio gently smiled before walking towards the men.

However——

“.....Don't joke about that.....!”

With strength infused to his trembling body, the boy rushed to grab Mio's hand in order to take her to quickly escape.

“! Wait!”

“Scoundrel——”

Left in a panic, the pursuers took out their guns and began shooting; sparks flew as their bullets ricocheted against the wall.

“What are you——”

“You idiot. Do you really think that these guys are trustworthy!? Even if they’ve got you, there’s no guarantee they won’t kill me or Mana afterwards!”

“.....! That’s——”

“As long as your still here with me, they won’t be able to lay a hand on Mana! In any case ——let’s rethink our position. Recapture Mana while also continuing to let Mio to live happily. That is the best route!”

The boy was screaming while running. Mio opened her eyes with a feeling of relief.

“.....! Un.....!”

However——at that very instant.

“——Oh my, how troubling. I wasn’t intending to lie.”

From the corner of his vision, he saw the figure of a man holding a large caliber gun.

The boy felt a scalding feeling come from his chest.

“Ah———?”

After a single pulse, the boy understood that he had just been shot.

Severe pain. The vibrations transmitted throughout his body made it impossible to breathe. Suddenly, his legs went limp as he collapsed on the spot. Slowly, slowly, he felt the feeling of being soaked by a lukewarm puddle.

“——!?! ——!”

Mio was saying something, desperately shouting something.

But soon, even those voices could no longer be heard.



After an uncountable number of sword clashes, magical light scattered into the air.

Artemisia slightly distorted her eyebrows while shaking off the laser spear dispatched by Origami.

“——Sure enough, you’re very capable.”

“You as well.”

Origami responded back to Artemisia’s praise.

Nonetheless, she was faintly aware from the previous battle that the combat ability of these two fighters was not truly equal.

Indeed, the amount of power Origami had at her disposal was staggering. Integrating a hybrid between her limited Astral Dress and Angel with her CR-Unit was perhaps something no one else in the world other than her was capable of achieving.

However, even with that additional maneuver, Artemisia was still the dominant one in the battle. It might have been a different story if Origami had full access to her Spirit powers. Unfortunately, it would difficult to defeat Artemisia with her powers sealed.

Be that as it may, it was likely that Artemisia also understood that.

Origami also understood by now that she couldn’t presently rival Artemisia. That is why, rather than attempting to kill Artemisia, Origami intentions lied on a defensive front aimed at securing enough time.

That's right, just as if waiting for something.

“.....”

Artemisia took a quick glance at her surroundings to assess the current situation.

In the nearby surroundings the <Bandersnatch> and DEM's wizards were fighting against Mana and the Spirits <Hermit> and <Zodiac>. Amidst that chaotic battle, Artemisia was engaging on a one-on-one battle against Origami, which was likely due to their plan to block access to support from other magicians.

——Was their purpose to delay Artemisia here? No, while it is important to suppress the enemy's no. 2, it would only be meaningful for the opposing party if they approach this while maintaining numerical superiority. For stopping Artemisia alone, they were using a large portion of their military force in the form of three Spirits and a Wizard. From that perspective, it seemed hardly cost efficient.

“Your goal——what on earth is it?”

“.....”

Although she tried to pressure Origami with her interrogation, Origami's facial expression had not changed in the slightest.

When it comes to Origami, her most terrifying aspect lies in her cunning rather than pure brute strength. Even though she was in no danger of losing if this continued, Artemisia still wanted to decide the outcome as soon as possible.

However, in order to do so, she needed at least one more helper. The person's strength need not compete with Origami's skill level. At that very least, it need only be a person to cut off Origami's escape route——

“——!”

While in mid-thought, Artemisia twitched her eyebrows slightly.

It was because an allied signal was confirmed by the sensor being projected onto her retina.

While also paying attention to Origami, Artemisia looked over to the other side, where several Wizards passing through the neighboring battlefield were quickly approaching their location.

Looking at the CR-Units they had equipped on, they were not DEM wizards. Likely, they were the local AST members that were requested. To be honest, their strength is lacking when combating against Spirits. However, in this demanding situation, reinforcements was exactly what was she needed.

“Just in time. This is DEM second executive officer, Artemisia Ashcroft. Call sign number is Adeptus 2. I am currently battling the Spirit. Please help block off the enemy’s escape route——after that I’ll handle everything else.”

Artemisia spoke out while kicking against the sky to accelerate towards Origami.

However.

“.....Sorry, but we can’t live up to your expectations. ——After all, we are all now unemployed!”

At the next moment, after hearing that voice from behind, the AST members began to open fire.

——Their target, Artemisia.

“Wha.....!?”

The sudden outburst left Artemisia momentarily stunned.

The laser blasts created dazzling gleams of light as they struck the territory enveloping Artemisia’s body.

Of course, the artillery shells fired by numerous Wizards were not enough to even scratch Artemisia's Voluntary Territory. However, as a result of the unexpected attack, Artemisia's attention momentarily faltered.

That mere moment was worth more than gold for the opposing side.

"——Fu———ha!"

Observing the crack in Artemisia's attention being scattered, Origami lunged at Artemisia while sharpening her spear by absorbing the ambient magical power from the surroundings.

"——!"

But, Artemisia was still——a monster.

Artemisia manipulated her territory in a flash, exerting a force against her own body in order for it to bend at an unnatural angle. Ribs crunched. There was no doubt that they were broken.

However, it was precisely because of this that Artemisia avoided Origami's blow. No——it would be too much to say that she had completely avoided. The cutting edge of Origami's blade beautifully sliced through the Territory, rendering Artemisia's flank asunder.

However, since her internal organs were safe, it was not a fatal blow that would eliminate her from the fight. Artemisia quickly retaliated by slashing at Origami with her laser sword <Arondight>.

"Ku....."

Blood splashed into the sky, Origami let out an anguished voice as Artemisia brazenly grinned with perspiration dripping from her face.

"A draw——no, I won."

But then, Origami made a rare action to move raise corners of her mouth.

“.....No. It’s mine——our, victory.”

At that instant——

“Huh.....?”

Artemisia could not help let out her voice against that strange feeling.

A strange object had appeared at the edge of her horizon.

It was——a key.

The tip of the huge key-shaped staff protruded from the void and towards Artemisia’s head.

Angel. The key angel, <Michael>.

Far behind Origami, she could see the figure of the Spirit——<Zodiac>, who inserted the key into the void.

At last, Artemisia understood.

Having AST Artemisia’s attraction, her victory against Origami——for the sake of their plan, even Origami was a decoy.

“<Michael>——<Rātaibu>.”

From the other side of the empty space exuding the key, a voice echoed at the same time as the key turned.

“Ah——”

A great deal of information, bursting in just like a stream, flowed into Artemisia’s mind.

“.....As expected of Captain. You made the correct judgement.....you were a great help.”

“.....No kidding, really. Time will not go back. Goodbye my civil servant life.....”

Her eardrum trembled from the conversation between Origami and the AST members.

While listening to a conversation on the battlefield that lacked any tension, Artemisia’s consciousness was overwhelmed by the waves of memory surging in.



“——Ufufu, Shidou-san, how long do you intend to act like that? Well, although I’m willing to accept it, but unfortunately isn’t this still the center of the battlefield?”

“.....! Ah——.”

Hearing Kurumi’s teasing manner, Shidou let go of his hand as his shoulders began to tremble a little.

In the midst of the chaotic war, he thought that this sarcastic quip would come from the <Nibelcol>, but he didn’t expect it to come from her.

Behind her, she was accompanied by the giant clock <Zafkiel>. ——This was not a clone. Rather, it was the genuine Spirit, Tokisaki Kurumi.

“Kurumi, I——.”

Just as Shidou was about to speak, he stopped himself mid-sentence. No, contrary to his own intentions, he had stopped himself.

Shidou had already known that Kurumi was on the battlefield as well, but after seeing Kurumi in person, the desire to speak piled up just like a mountain.

However——no, it was precisely because of the sudden encounter with Kurumi that Shidou's mind became flooded with so many thoughts that clogged against his ability to properly speak.

“Ara, ara.”

Was it because she had caught Shidou acting in such a manner? After flirtatiously raising the corners of her lips, she reached to embrace Shidou's neck. Then, she tightly pulled closer to him.

“Wha——?”

Although shocked, Shidou immediately calmed down.

Since Shidou heard deafening gunshot resounds right behind him.

“Kya.....”

Behind his back, a <Nibelcol> collapsed while letting out a dying cry. Apparently, Kurumi had shot the <Nibelcol> in the forehead using the gun in her hand.

“You can't be too careless.”

“A-ah, thank you Kurumi. You saved me, you're a lifesaver.”

“Ufufu, that's quite the exaggeration.”

Kurumi replied back in a joking manner. However, for Shidou, those words were not an exaggeration at all. On the contrary, it couldn't even convey one percent of the feelings held within his mind.

“No, it's not just for now. Since the very beginning——you've saved me countless times. So really, thank you very much. No matter what.....I want to tell you that directly.”

“ ”

Hearing what Shidou had said, Kurumi remained silent for a while. However, she immediately bounced back with a revitalized smile.

“Ara, ara, you’re very welcome. Then, as thanks for that, can Shidou-san give me his reiryoku?”

“That’s a separate matter!”

“Ufufu, that’s a shame. It looks like I’ll have to switch to a more forceful manner.....ack!”

Shidou and Kurumi exchanged loud shouts as they kicked off against the ground at the same time.

Rather than falling into an impasse; instead, both of them left to repel the incoming attack lead by the <Nibelcol>.

Kurumi fired a consecutive barrage of shadow bullets at the <Nibelcol>.

Meanwhile, Shidou blew a kiss at the <Nibelcol> in anticipation of at the same time of snatching their lips away. The other <Nibelcol>, who had saw this scene, turned beet red in embarrassment before fading away.

“Fu.....ahahahaha! What is that!”

Looking at Shidou’s method of repelling the <Nibelcol>, Kurumi laughed at the amusing action from the depths of her heart.

“Using such a means to deal with the <Nibelcol> that can resurrect endlessly.....? Ufufu, so that reason why Shidou-san, who is being targeted, rushed to the forefront. When I first recognized Shidou at the battlefield, I was contemplating killing you myself.”

“Hey, hey.....”

Shidou let out a wry smile as he heard Kurumi’s dangerous speech, but it wasn’t as if he couldn’t understand Kurumi’s intentions. Making countless sacrifices to protect others, it was just like streaking through a minefield. Even

if it were not Kurumi, anyone would be forced to adopt a killing intent at that situation.

However, Shidou was the same in that respect.

Before departing, he was instructed by Kotori to keep survival as his first priority.

It was akin to chasing two people simultaneously down the rabbit hole. Even so, Shidou constantly reminded himself not to fall too far too deep in order to reach Kurumi.

However, he still could not stop. In this chaotic battlefield, if he missed this opportunity of a miraculous encounter like that, Shidou thought he would no longer be able to seize Kurumi's hand.

Shidou resolved of the <Nibelcol> on his side before shouting loudly towards Kurumi.

“——Kurumi! I'm grateful from the bottom of my heart for you saving me! Thanks to you the Spirits didn't inverse either! Thank you so much!However, should I honestly hide since DEM is attacking with all their might!? I don't remember asking for that extent! I'm not happy that you're saving my life in exchange for your own life!”

“.....Ara? That's pretty arrogant; I just want the power of Shidou-san's reiryoku. Besides, in exchange for my life? That makes me feel like I'm being underestimated. Do you think, I, Tokisaki Kurumi, will lose against DEM?”

“.....N-no, it's just in practice it would be a bitter fight regardless of acting tough!”

Hearing Shidou cry out after kissing the <Nibelcol>, Kurumi let out an impatient stare at that direction.

“Don't pretend to be brave. It's honestly fine for Shidou-san to wait obediently onboard that aircraft. After this is over, you can be choked with tears of gratitude and present me your reiryoku in return!”

“In that case, wouldn’t that just change my murderer from DEM to you!?”

“I didn’t say that! I will change everything with Shidou-san’s reiryoku. Before you even notice it, it will already be a new world! Spirits will no longer exist, everything will return back to a calm and peaceful world!”

“There is no power that can perfectly revise history! Do you think that the changes will occur that smoothly!?”

“I don’t want to hear that from someone who has already successfully changed history!”

“When you put it like that, dammit it!”

Hearing Kurumi cite such a powerful example, Shidou issued out a loud lament.

Shidou had already succeeded once in changing history through borrowing the power of Kurumi’s angel <Zafkiel>.

“That’s right! “Shidou-san’s death” will disappear by itself. So what else is there a reason to be dissatisfied!?”

“There will definitely be dissatisfaction!”

“So then, what exactly——”

“If everything did not happen.....that means I would have never met you! Even that very fact would disappear, right!”

“!”

Hearing Shidou suddenly shout, Kurumi was at a loss of words.

“I like you; I can’t stand having my encounter with you simply fade away!”

“Wha.....what are you saying, at this time. Did you hit your head?!”

“I didn’t hit my head! I’m very clear-headed right now. Anyhow, Kurumi, don’t you also like me as well!”

“Ha.....ah!?”

Hearing what Shidou had said, Kurumi could only stare in alarm.

“What.....! Please don’t arbitrarily talk about the feelings of others!”

“No ——I’m not mistaken! Why else you repeat time for over 200 times for a person you don’t like!”

“That was for the sake of obtaining your reiryoku——”

“Don’t forget I relived your memories through the tenth bullet <Yud>.”

“——.”

Kurumi held her breath in surprise.

Exactly the other day, Shidou had experience Kurumi’s past through the power of the Tenth Bullet <Yud> of <Zafkiel>.

However, at the same time, it wasn’t just the motives for revenge that flowed into Shidou’s mind.

Fragmentary——but surely it was her feelings towards Shidou.

The passionate sentiments of a young maiden that one would cast away as forbidden to avoid shame, it was the aftermath of those thoughts that was conveyed to Shidou.

“...,!”

Kurumi flushed bright red just like a tomato. After writhing in embarrassment for a brief moment, she finally adjusted her breathing and stared at Shidou.

“.....Even if you are saying the truth, it’s terrible to say that while kissing other women.”

“I’m very sorry!”

On one side, Shidou honestly apologized, while on the other he exchanging a passionate kiss with the <Nibelcol>. The <Nibelcol> staggered on her feet for a while, but eventually groaned out a “hawa” sound before disappearing into light particles.

Kurumi turned the other way while let out a “huff” sound from her nose. Afterwards, with her throat slightly trembling, she tightened the grip on her gun.

“Doesn’t that mean—you want me to give up on my goal? Let me abandon the many lives that I’ve robbed? ——Sawa-san, are you asking me let her stay dead without even trying to save her?”

Quiet——but Kurumi’s voice was full of intense anger and resentment.

“No way.”

Shidou shook his head in response.

“Like I said, I’ve experienced your memories. How could it ever be simple to advise you to give up?”

“.....Then, what do you intend to do? Not only opposed to erasing our encounter, but also not intending to let me give up on my goal? No matter how it’s phrased, that’s too contradictory.

“Aahh.....that’s right. Even I feel what I said was absurd. ——But!”

Shidou cried out after launching a kiss at the <Nibelcol>.

“Ah, this really is a last resort! In order to achieve both of our wishes!”

“Huh.....?”

“——Not *everything*! Just to overturn only the bad things. Making choices in the development of things in order to change history into its ideal form.....! If that were achievable, what do you think?”

Shidou raised his voice to a scream that felt like he was crushing his own throat. In response, Kurumi wrinkled her brows as if not understanding what he was saying.

“W-what are you saying.....? I can’t understand this at all. Do you think that something like that can be accomplished.....?”

“I don’t know.”

“.....”

Upon hearing Shidou’s affirmation, Kurumi made a sullen face. However, Shidou expected as much and continued forward.

“That’s for sure! After all, it’s yet to be tried. However, it is a gamble worth betting on!”

“.....Then let’s hear it. ——This pipe dream, what can be done to achieve this?”

“Good question! First off, I will seal your reiryoku!”

Hearing Shidou’s words, Kurumi could only let out a sigh.

“I really shouldn’t have asked. There’s no value discussing this over. This conversation——”

But.

Shidou continued on without any concern.

“——Afterwards, with my reiryoku, I’ll use <Zafkiel> in order to travel back to 30 years ago.....!”

“.....,Ha——”

Listening to this.

Kurumi stared vacantly, with her eyes becoming blank two dots on a line.

“What.....is the purpose of that? That would be no different than I going myself ——”

“There is one thing! From Kurumi’s perspective, you can only stop the birth of the Spirit of Origin! However, if I went, I can perhaps seal the power of the Spirit of Origin.....!”

“Seal.....!? Your plan is to seal the power of the Spirit of Origin.....!?”

Perhaps shocked by Shidou’s intentions, Kurumi filled with an unusual amount of confusion in her voice. Having just dodged danger by a hair’s breath, Shidou replied by back by nodding and saying “yes!”

“That’s right! That person is also a Spirit!? Then, that would be my job! Although I don’t know how much reiryoku she has in the end, but let me—— make her fall in love!”

“.....!?”

Hearing that, Kurumi was rendered momentarily stunned.

Shidou continued to push forward with this momentum.

“And then! If I seal the Spirit of Origin, I will use that power.....to redo history! The misfortune that happen to Kurumi! I will walk into that carnage to ensure that life will have *never happened*! Afterwards, I want to——meet with you again. Not only that! The same is true for the other Spirits! Reaching a hand out to those who need salvation, repairing an irreversible mistake! I will create the most ideal history.....!”

“Wha...what are you saying! That kind of chance for success, then——”

“That’s the reason I said I don’t know! But isn’t this so-called Spirit of Origin the existence that became the source of all other Spirits!? If so, she should have a terrible power to match that! So then——there is one thing certain!”

Shidou pointed his thumb against his chest.

“Let me repeat back what you just said, Kurumi.

I am the only one in the world. A human who has rewritten history!”

“————”

Kurumi was at a loss for words as she stared blankly at Shidou.

However, at the moment, there was a scream of annoyance coming from the front.

“Aaaaa! Don’t ignore my existence, while enjoying a world with only two people——!”

Accompanied by the cry of the <Nibelcol>, countless pages fluttered around just like a blizzard.

The numerous pages gathered around one <Nibelcol>, surrounding the body tightly just like secure armor.

“<Beelzebub • Page> ——— <Library Binding>!”

The <Nibelcol>, wrapped in paper armor, pounced off against the ground and lunged towards Kurumi at a tremendous speed. With their shoulders reflexively moving in a flash, Shidou and Kurumi released a bullet and blew a kiss at the same time.

However——

“Fuu!”

The <Nibelcol> flicked off the bullet and subsequently ignoring the thrown kiss while continuing to make a mad dash forward.

Yet, that was to be expected, the paper armor wrapping on the <Nibelcol> completely covered even her eyes.

“.....Ah.”

At that position, it was already too late for both of them even if they had already notice it beforehand. The <Nibelcol>’s speed was to the point where even Kurumi could not evade it with her own physical prowess.

‘Kurumi————’

“.....!”

“Kiyahahahaha Dieeeee!”

Aiming to lunge at Kurumi’s right side, the armor on the <Nibelcol>’s forearm had transformed into a conical spear.

————The sharp blow from the <Nibelcol> approached her chest at tremendous speed.

At such a sight, Kurumi felt like in was rendered in slow motion. This was not Kurumi using <Zafkiel> to accelerate her own movements. Nor was it the speed of the <Nibelcol> being actually slowed down.

It was only a condensing of one’s consciousness producing such a brief illusion of instantaneous time.

This was the so-called revolving lantern caused by the brain, during the peril of death, to find a countermeasure through past experiences and memories. Right now, Kurumi was in a similar state. While, her consciousness was still very clear, the reaction time of her body could not keep up with that very same consciousness just as she was about to receive a fatal blow.

From this timing, it would be difficult to completely avoid the <Nibelcol>'s attack. As long as it was not a fatal blow, Kurumi could still use the fourth bullet <Dalet>. However, if a clean hit was landed, it would doubtful to say that the <Nibelcol> would let her do that instead of pursing to strike her down.

A miscalculation. Sure enough the fighting should have been left to the clones while the main body watched from a distance while hiding in her shadow.

——No, they would be at a large disadvantage anyway. Fighting without using <Zafkiel> would only be wasting her troops in vain.

No, before that, there was something more to reflect on.

Ahh——that's right. It was impossible not to be distracted by Shidou's voice.

No matter how fast the <Nibelcol>'s attack is, as long as struck again in the gap time to recover, she should have enough time to reload a bullet from <Zafkiel>.

Having said that, it was also unavoidable.

Because of Shidou's words, a voice——that swayed Kurumi's heart.

Preposterous, absurd, and nonsensical prattle.

However, Kurumi thought to herself.

How wonderful it would be if that actually came true.

How happy it would be to entrust that dream.

If you had to die like this, at the very least, you should entrust your strength to Shidou——

“——So, is me, thinking something along those lines?”

Just then.

Amidst her keen consciousness, a voice resounded that had read through Kurumi's heart.

At that moment.

From Kurumi's shadow, a Kurumi clone wearing a distinctive eyepatch emerged and accepted the incoming blow from the <Nibelcol> with her own body.

—There was no doubt. This was the Tokisaki Kurumi clones from five years ago that Kurumi had kept alive during that time.

Flowers of blood bloomed in front of Kurumi's vision. The tip of the hand penetrating eyepatch Kurumi was exposed right in front of her face.

"Me.....!?"

Finally, her body's reaction time caught up with her mental timing. A stunned voice leaked out from her throat.

However, Kurumi quickly regained her composure.

With her body still penetrated by the <Nibelcol>'s hand, eyepatch Kurumi glanced towards Kurumi's direction

"—See, look.....? Useful, in the end.....right?"

After finishing, she smiled slightly proudly.

"——, Yes. Although, this wasn't my originally intention, it was worthwhile to keep you alive."

Immediately, Kurumi took out her short pistol and snipped the <Nibelcol> with the <Fourth Bullet> <Dalet> while aiming over eyepatch Kurumi's shoulder.

The bullet condensed burst against the paper armor surrounding the <Nibelcol>.

The time reversal of the Fourth Bullet <Dalet> turned the iron clad armor back into scattering sheets of paper.

Suddenly, the <Nibelcol> completely defenseless.

The next moment, it seemed that Shidou, who running towards Kurumi, extended out his hands towards the <Nibelcol>'s neck and stole her lips.

“Yaa——n.....”

Letting out a sweet voice, the <Nibelcol> faded away into light particle. After confirming the scene, Shidou quickly turned his attention to Kurumi.

“Are you alright, Kurumi!”

“.....Yes.”

Kurumi replied back while staring at the pool of blood beside Eyepatch Kurumi. Shidou, who saw it as well, was filled with a grief stained expression. However, eyepatch Kurumi responded back with a satisfied smile.

“*Me*, please..... honestly.....confront your own heart——”

After finishing, she collapsed into the shadow.

“Kurumi, that——”

“——Please do not mind the *me* that was supposed have already been dead. Although it was a hopeless clone, she was finally useful before dying.”

“.....Ug, there's no need to say that.....”

Half way through, Shidou stopped speaking. Surely, it was because he saw Kurumi looking down with her lips tightly pursed.

“.....”

Kurumi turned toward Shidou for a moment, before taking a light breath to regain her composure. Afterwards, she turned to face Shidou once again.

That's right. Kurumi must ask him.

To verify whether or not the idea that passed through her mind when she preparing for death was correct or not.

In order to confirm to herself if she could follow through with what Eyepatch Kurumi, the one who had saved her life, had said.

“——Moreover, Shidou-san, what you said before, how serious about it were you?”

As Kurumi asked while intently staring at his eyes, Shidou answered back while slightly furrowing his brow.

“Of course——from the bottom of my heart.”

“.....”



While staring back directly at her line of sight, Shidou replied back candidly.

——Ahh, how annoying. How really annoying.

He, from the bottom of his heart, believes in something that is not known whether or not it's actually possible to achieve.

And even knowing that the road will be filled with suffering, he still planned to bring it to fruition.

Yes, for Shidou, there wasn't even the slightest hint of hesitation.

And it was all for the sake on the account of a dream that Kurumi had told. Surely——even before to say, “I like you” as well.

“——Ahh, ahh, I really am stupid.”

Kurumi let out a self-depreciating sigh before continuing onward.

“Hey——Shidou-san, do you still remember that? The *contest* between us.”

“Huh?”

Hearing what Kurumi had said, Shidou widened his gaze as he replied back.

“.....whoever makes the other fall in love, wins?”

“——Fufu.”

Kurumi slowly loosened her mouth as she began to speak.

“Let's continue the rest of this chat after this battle. If DEM is repelled and after the threat on Shidou's life is adverted——my lips devoting you might not be a bad idea.”

“.....! Really, Kurumi.....!”

Shidou's eyes widened in surprise upon hearing what was said.

Seeing that look, Kurumi could not help but almost laugh. ——Having tried to wear a graceful conduct up until now, it seemed he couldn't maintain that aloof demeanor up until the very end as his eyes began glimmering just like a child.

“.....Really, how cute.”

“Huh?”

“It's nothing. ——More than that, it's only if you last long enough to defeat DEM. Well, ufufu, can you manage that Shidou-san?”

“Of course! After that is done, we'll discuss facing the Spirit of Origin as an adversary together!”

After Shidou spoke out full of vigor, he gently extended out hand out to Kurumi.

As if saying, let's go together.

“.....Fufu.”

Kurumi let out faint as she slowly lifted up her own hand towards his.

Then, at that moment——



“A.....ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh——!”

——A cry of grief dominated the entire world.

Uncontrollable sobs of tears was overflowing from the eyes as the sounds of incessant screams screeched out from the throat.

But such a thing could not even convey a single fragment of Mio's tremendous sorrow.

Right now before Mio——only the boy was laying in front of him.

At that moment, the boy was shot after trying to escape after taking Mio's hand. Mio, who was overwhelmed by anger, sadness, and confusion, indiscriminately dispersed her reiryoku without any distinction, which subsequently destroyed her surroundings and allowed her to flee the scene.

There were no wounds left on the boy's body, since Mio had used her reiryoku to close his wounds.

However——the boy would still not wake up.

Certainty, with Mio's power, she could heal an injured body.

However, it was impossible to restore a life once it had been lost.

“Why.....w...why.....”

Mio——cried.

She cried, cried, unable to stop weeping, to the point she lost track of the passage of time.

Even so, the tears would not stop.

Mio was extremely grateful to the boy.

Mio liked the boy.

If the boy had never found Mio, she would never be where she was now. The boy gave her a home, food, clothing, as well as knowledge, Mio understood that well.

But——wrong.

Those things were already gone.

Now that the boy had passed away, where she can no longer meet again, only then did Mio finally understand.

How large of existence that boy was to her heart, how irreplaceable he was to her.

After that one person was gone, the world that was once so colorful turned to an ashen shade of gray. Even the days once filled with hope, everything was gone.

There first encounter happened by chance. But now it wasn't an exaggeration to say—that boy was Mio's reason to live. He was everything to her.

If she had never met the boy.

If she had not relied on the boy so much.

If she had chosen death for herself——

——the boy may not have died.

Meaningless regret circled around her mind.

“.....,”

Mio bit against her lip until it was bleeding while scuffling against her hair. She channeled her thought process towards thinking. With all of the knowledge that had been accumulated up until now. Using all of the conjectures and imagination derived from those experiences to find a means of overcoming this despair.

However, no matter how much she thought, no answer came.

Human beings were too fragile. Even if he had successfully survived that moment, as long as that boy was targeted by that group of men, he would still someday die.

No, no only that. Human beings were terribly short-lived.

From the knowledge obtained in books and her own understanding; unlike Mio, human beings could only live for about 100 years at best.

Even if all of the other problems were ruled out, the boy would still likely die before Mio. Could she tolerate such a fact?

“

In order to see the boy's smile again.

In order to stay with the boy for as long as possible, what exactly needed to be done?

Mio was in deep thought.

Continuing on——thinking and thinking.

——How long did it take?

“.....Ah.....”

Without even noticing it her lips rustled against each other, leaking out a small voice.

“That's.....right.....”

Mio unsteadily propped his body, looking at the boy's quiet sleep like expression.

“——Rebuilding from scratch.....that should enough.”

She murmured while gently caressing the boy's cheeks.

Yes.

This was the answer Mio had reached after her long thought process.

——Mio licked her wet lips, drawing closer to the boy's face.

Then, she pressed her lips onto his lips.

Although his lips felt soft, all body temperature had been lost.

“.....”

Mio closed her eyes to concentrate.

It was the feeling of altering the surrounding world with her mind.

Then, the boy's body transformed into faint light particles——slowly being absorbed into Mio's body.

“.....Un.....”

After Mio completely absorbed the boy's body, she let out a small sigh while getting up at the same time.

Then, she gently stroked her belly.

“——I will give birth to you; once again you will be born.”

This time you will never die.

This time you will never be broken.”

The boy who already died would not come back to life.

Then——using her own womb, she could just recreate the boy altogether.
No, it was more than just that.

In the process of reconstructing his body in her womb, Mio would bestow a power onto the boy.

The boy will once again have his own body while also gaining the power of a Spirit.

Ahhh——however, doing only that was not enough.

The human body was still too fragile. If she gave everything at once, his body would not be able to endure it and would self-destruct.

Little by little, little by little.

It had to be divided into several factors first before handing it to the boy one by one.

So initially, there will be only one ability given to prepare for that.

“——The ability to absorb power.”

Someday, one day, once the boy is born he will be raised, and obtain a stable body.

Then, she would have to spread the seeds across the world for him get it one by one.

Mio would watch only from the sidelines.

Then, once the boy obtained all of the power——

The boy will have a power that would prevent him from being harmed by anyone.

Close to possessing an eternal life.

Afterwards, he will be Mio's eternal lover.

“——I'll never let you go. I absolutely won't make a mistake anymore.

Mio muttered while gently stroking her stomach.

So.....please wait——Shin."



“————Huh.....?”

On the battlefield.

Shidou let out an almost muted sound.

Yet that was to be expected. After all, from his side, there was a hand that did not belong to Kurumi extending out from Kurumi chest.

This was neither a metaphor nor a joke. Like a fresh flower in bloom, a white hand stretched out from Kurumi’s chest.

While watching this scene with strange scene of déjà vu unfolding, Shidou thought to himself that he had seen this before.

That right. During June. On the school rooftop.

The sight was just like the time when the real Kurumi struck down from behind a clone who also extending her hand out to Shidou.

For a passing second, Shidou’s mind immediately recreated that fateful scene. However, the Kurumi in front of him right now was undoubtedly the original. Additionally, the hand extending outward did not seem like Kurumi’s, and he highly doubted that there would be a clone who wants to pass through using the chest of the original.

But if that were the case.....

“.....Huh?”

While seemingly a little late to notice, Kurumi stared at her chest blankly with eyes wide open as if not understanding what was occurring.

“Wha.....is.....this.....?”

“Ah————”

Following Kurumi’s voice, the arm extended out little by little.

It was just like *something* was crawling out of Kurumi.

“Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah.....”

“Kurumi!”

As the arms moved its fingers to claw itself outside, Kurumi let out an agonizing groan. Shidou instinctively called out her name.

However, the progress did not stop until eventually——

“Tokisaki Kurumi. Thank you. You were a wonderful friend up until the very end.”

Accompanied by that voice, *it* revealed its appearance.

To Be Continued

Afterward

Tachibana: What would be a good title for volume 17?

Editor: There needs to be a sense of conveying a decisive battle.

Tachibana: “Kurumi Wars.....”

Editor: “Kurumi Armageddon.....?”

Tachibana: “Kurumi Ragnarok——

Editor: “Cool.”

Tachibana: “Cool.”

Such was the manner of how volume 17's title was decided. Cool. Every man should follow with that principle in mind in their hearts.

Long time no see. My favorite Mario is indigo, it's Tachibana Koushi. Date A Live 17 Kurumi Ragnarok (Cool) has been delivered to everyone's hands. What did you think? It would be great if you liked it.

The title is about Kurumi, but Nibelcol is on the cover. If you think about it, it's the first color illustration of it. The Nibelcol in the background is also very sexy and cute.

It's already 17 volumes after continuing from the previous volume, but this time I was very excited writing many scenes that I wanted to write for a long time. Like this. And that. In particular, the last scene was an original concept that came to mind when the concept of date was conceived, so there's a deep feeling from that one.

This publication was successful due to the contribution of the following parties.

Illustration Tsunako-san, thank you so much for every nice illustration. I'm sorry for increasing the number of new designs needed in the plain format. Manger-san, sorry for the trouble this time as well. To all those involved in

designs, editing, sales, publishing, distribution, and to you who have taken this book right now, thank you very much.

Well then, how will it develop after this end? Look forward to Shidou's efforts next time.

I also look forward to seeing you in the next volume.

July 2017 Koushi Tachibana